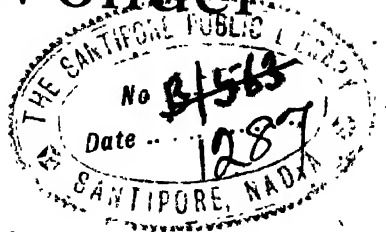


The Little Wonder



By
Nat Gould

AUTHOR OF THE NOVELS FACING THIS PAGE

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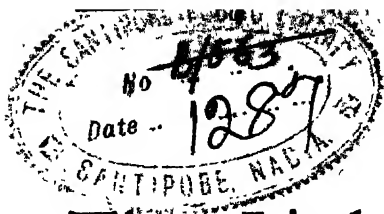
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The Little Wonder

CHAPTER I

THE MERRY BELLE

"S'POSE you'll want to go and see old Eli when we get to Poolbank Lock?"

The speaker was a tall, powerful, rough-looking man, with coarse red hair and a beard of the same colour. He stood at the helm of a canal-barge, and shouted to a lad who was walking alongside the horse on the towing-path, whistling, and kicking up loose stones as he went on his way.

The boy stopped, shouted his reply, waved his hand, then trotted after the horse.

"Th'old man and that lad are as thick as two kittens," said Josiah Fudge. "I never seed the likes of it; blame me if I doan't think old Eli'd break his heart if the little 'un didn't turn up."

Josiah Fudge was the proprietor of the *Merry Belle* barge, and the boy, Dan Hind, had been with him about two years. The canal-boat owned by Josiah Fudge had a better reputation than the majority of such craft. It was clean, well-fitted, and easily handled. The cabin, a general living-room, was tidy, even comfortable, not to mention roomy, and was presided over by Mrs. Fudge, a merry little woman—a marked contrast to her big husband. They had been married some six or seven years and had no children. When Dan Hind's mother died—she was Eli Hind's daughter—Nancy Fudge proposed to Josiah that they should take the boy on board.

"He'll be useful; he's a handy little chap, and he'll be company for us; we have no chit of our own," she said with a sigh.

"Y'er always throwin' that up into my face," growled Josiah. "It's as much your fault as mine. Haven't I offered to get you a couple of kids out of the union? They're to be had for the askin', and kiddies are much of a muchness."

"I didn't mean nothin'," said Nancy.

"Wimmin never does," said Josh, continuing his growl.

"I'm sure Eli would let Danny come on the *Merry Belle*," said Nancy.

"Well, I'm blowed! Let him come!" exclaimed Josh. "Mighty con-descending of him, isn't it? Let him come! He'd jump at the chance, if so be as his legs 'ud help him."

"I'd like to have him; he's a nice little lad, and he's had some schooling," said Nancy.

"Much good that'll do him," said Josh. "He's such a small chap, he'd never be able to handle the old mare."

"That he would ; he's fond of horses, and he's had the run of the stables at Eagle Hurst. You'll ask Eli, won't you, Josh?"

"Better ask him yourself, he'll take more notice of you than me, you're a favourite of his ; next to his gal that's dead and gone he liked you better than any one. It was Eli advised you not to marry me, weren't it?" said Josh.

"He only did that because he thought I was young and small, and you were big and—and——" said Nancy.

"Old ; go on with it, old. Me old ! I'm a chicken, not fledged yet. I'm not more'n ten years older than you, Nance."

"You don't look that," said his wife, smiling.

"Gammon," said Josh, smiling back at her.

"I mean it," she said ; "ask any one."

"Not me, I'll take your word for it. Nance, are you ever like feeling sorry you married me?"

"Nor' no ; why should I ? Haven't we all we want, and there isn't a better boat than the *Merry Belle* on the canal, and everybody knows Josiah Fudge is a prospering man," said Nancy.

"Prospering is it !" exclaimed Josh. "There's not much to be got out o' boats now. I've heard it said that afore railways was known men got rich at this game ; there a bare living in it now, that's all, my lass."

She had her own opinion as to the amount of money made yearly out of the canal-boat, but like a wise woman, intent on having her way, she made no reply.

"You'll see Eli about Dan, won't you?" she asked in her sweetest tones, which always had a soothing effect on this big, powerful man.

"It'll be one more to feed."

"He'll not eat much, and he'll be useful."

"All right ; I'll ask Eli when we get to Poolbank."

He was as good as his word : and leaving the boat safely moored, he walked to the village.

The interview with Eli was longer than he expected ; the old man made many stipulations—the boy must be well treated, not overworked ; he'd heard dreadful tales about the ill-usage of children on canal-boats. A watchful eye must be kept on him in case he fell overboard. Was the mare safe for a lad to handle ? He hoped the food would be good, if plain, and that the boat was clean. Danny must be allowed to visit him when they were at Poolbank.

Josiah's face was a study as Eli Hind spoke out his wants. At first it showed resentment. This gradually gave place to an amused expression, and finally he laughed heartily as Eli concluded.

"What are you making that horrid noise for?" asked Eli indignantly.

"It struck me funny," said Josh.

"What ? Where's the fun come in?" asked Eli.

"It sounded like making arrangements to send him to a first-class schooling shop."

"Oh, did it? Then you don't agree to abide by my stipulations?" said Eli.

"I know nowt about stipulations," said Josh, whose mode of speech varied a good deal according to his state of mind; "but we'll do all we can to make the lad comfortable, if so be as he behaves. Nance wants him; and she's a favourite of yours, isn't she?"

"Oh, it's Nance wants him, is it?" said Eli. "That makes a difference; I can trust Nance. I wonder why she took up with you. A nice-looking lass she was; she might have done better."

"Ask her and hear what she says about it," said Josh.

"When a woman's in love she's blind to the man's faults, and not likely to speak truth," said Eli.

"We've been married a good while. Perhaps she's got over bein' in love with me," said Josh.

"I know better; the last time I saw her she said she loved you as much as ever. I can't make it out; there's a lot of you, Josh, but not much in you," said Eli.

Josiah Fudge bore Eli's growls good-humouredly; he liked the old man, and knew that despite his words Eli had a very fair opinion of him.

"I can tell Nance you'll let Danny come on board the *Merry Belle*?"

"Yes, if the boy's willing."

"He's ready enough to come, I'll warrant; he'll like the life."

"He's happy enough here," said Eli with a sigh, as he thought of parting with the boy.

This was about two years ago, and Dan Hind had been on the *Merry Belle* since that time.

Dan was a very small lad for his age—thirteen. He did not look more than eleven; but he was strong and healthy; the open-air life agreed with him. His father, a miner, was killed in an explosion, and his mother, Eli Hind's daughter, died when he was eight years old, since which time he had lived with his grandfather until he went on the *Merry Belle*. The lad was very fond of horses, in fact all sorts of animals, and was constantly to be found at the Eagle Hurst Stables, where the Poolbank Hounds were kept. He was a favourite with the men, and sometimes had a ride on a quiet cob or pony.

Dan liked the life on the *Merry Belle*—there was a good deal of freedom about it. Nancy Fudge treated him like her own child. Josh growled, saying she spoiled him, at the same time acknowledging the boy was useful and to be trusted. One thing Josh objected to. At sundry locks and stopping places Dan had a habit of annexing stray kittens and puppies, which he concealed on board with Mrs Fudge's connivance. When Josh stumbled across them, as he often did, there were "explosions" and threats to throw the "little beasts" overboard. Dan caught larks and other singing birds; the concerts given by these feathered warblers sometimes exasperated Josh, who gave the birds their liberty when no one was about, and put down the disappearances to the kittens.

The *Merry Belle* carried all kinds of cargoes, with the exception of coals ; Josiah Fudge drew the line there. Once, when very hard pressed, he accepted coals, the experience was useful. It convinced him that coals and comfort were impossible on a canal-boat. Merchandise of various kinds mostly occupied the hold of the *Merry Belle*, and his boat seldom lacked a full cargo. Despite delays at locks, laggings by the way, and a tendency to take things easy, the *Merry Belle* was fairly punctual in her arrival at her destination, and in the course of a year travelled many miles on the water highway. She passed through a picturesque, fertile, agricultural country during the middle portion of her voyage, and if at the beginning and the end it was necessary for the old mare to put on a spurt and tug harder at the towline, she had a pretty easy time when the hedgerows showed green on either side, and the sheep and cattle cropped grass in luxuriant pastures. This same old mare came into Josiah Fudge's hands in a strange way, which shall be related in due course.

The owner of the *Merry Belle*, although a rough man, was a lover of nature, and had a kindly heart. He was a native of Poolbank, as was also his wife, and had been on the Grand Canal ever since he was a boy. When he boarded his first boat the conditions of canal work were far more severe than when Dan Hind became one of the crew of the *Merry Belle*. Fudge had a very rough time indeed, and suffered hardships that would have killed many lads. He was cuffed and knocked about, had bad food, and very little of it. His strength was overtaxed, and he tramped mile upon mile on the towing-path until he was so exhausted that when he came on board he often fell in a heap and was dragged below. Despite this treatment he grew strong and healthy, and one day astonished a brutal taskmaster by knocking him off his boat into the canal. This was the turning-point in his career, for instead of resenting his conduct the man said there was plenty of pluck in Josiah Fudge, and if he liked he could remain aboard at an advanced wage. This unexpected conduct so amazed Josh that he accepted the terms offered, and they actually became friends—in a way.

By degrees Josh Fudge worked his way up and saved money. He met Nancy Bell, fell in love with her, said if she would marry him he would have a boat of his own, and on these terms she accepted him.

Much to the surprise of Poolbank Josiah Fudge got his boat. How he obtained possession of such a splendid craft puzzled them, and he did not enlighten them. He told Nancy, however, and she approved of what he had done.

"You'll soon pay the balance off, I'm sure," she said. "You must have worked hard and saved every penny to put so much cash down."

"I did, Nance ; but I had a bit of luck as well."

"How ? What did you do ?

"I'm a bit of a sport, my dear, and I had two hundred and fifty pounds to ten shillings—the Cæsarewitch and Cambridgeshire double, and it came off. I was never so surprised in my life and I don't suppose I ever shall be again. When I sent the ten bob over the water I said—

"That's for Nance and me, it means our wedding if it comes off, and summat tells me it will."

"And it did, Josh, I am glad," she said.

"And when I got the bit of paper I planked it down for the boat straight away, I hadn't even a drink on the strength of it. The owner was very good to me, and wished me luck; he's a good fellow is Jim Case."

It was not long before Josiah Fudge cleared off the debt on the boat, and became the absolute owner of the *Merry Belle*.

CHAPTER II

THE COTTAGE

THE *Merry Belle* arrived at Poolbank, and Dan Hind, being granted leave of absence, hurried off to see his grandfather.

"Give my love to Eli," Nancy called out as he walked away.

"You'd better go with the lad, and kiss him," said Josh.

"Who, Danny?"

"No. I mean Eli; maybe he'd like it, and I'm sure you would."

"I don't care about kissing any man except you, Josh, and Eli's getting on for seventy, isn't he?"

Josh appeared satisfied: his wife handled him well, she knew he was jealous and rather liked it.

Dan walked along the wide, white road, whistling and singing, stopping occasionally to listen to the birds, then imitating their songs fairly well. It was June; the country round Poolbank was resplendent in its summer dress, the sun was hot, the road dusty, and Dan, growing thirsty, clambered over a wall, dropped into a garden, and helped himself at the well. There was no one about, and he knew this well of old; the water was always cold, even on the hottest day. The garden belonged to the cottage where one of the gamekeepers at Eagle Hurst lived, and he had granted Dan permission to use the well, on condition he came in at the gate and did not scramble over the wall "bringing down a heap of stones."

Seeing no one about Dan climbed: it was the nearest way and his thirst was great. How cold and refreshing the water was! it relieved his parched mouth, and he bathed his hands and face, wiping them on a rather grimy handkerchief. Seeing a bucket close by he filled it with water, then took off his shoes and stockings and plunged his feet in. He felt much more comfortable when he continued his journey. It was about two miles from the lock to Poolbank village, and Eli Hind lived on the outskirts at the far end.

Dan was well known in Poolbank, and as he sauntered along he encountered several acquaintances, some his own age, others older, for every one was glad of a chat with him. This took up his time; he had no objections to airing his knowledge as a traveller. The lads of the village regarded Dan as a fount of knowledge about the outside world of which

they saw so little. He told them wondrous tales which caused blank astonishment, but however far-fetched were Dan's stories they were readily believed. Poolbank was a pretty village, the cottagers took pride in their gardens, which were all well kept and full of flowers; in June the place was a blaze of colour, and tourists often stayed to look at the beautiful scene. Many of the cottages were ancient, built of brick and stone, with curious doors on which were suspended antique knockers of metal-work, which were often examined by the curious. Most of the property in the village was owned by the squire, Henry Colbert Foyle, of Eagle Hurst, the master of the Poolbank hounds, and a popular sportsman, one of the best sort of race-horse owners, a liberal patron of all kinds of outdoor amusements.

The church was very old, traces of Norman architecture were to be found, and several curious old monuments occupied small side chapels in the interior. In the chancel the old oak seats were quaintly carved, and there was ample evidence that at one time the place had been a priory. The living was in the gift of Squire Foyle, and he had presented it to the son of his old tutor, the Rev. Cecil Havers, who had been there for some years.

Dan Hind passed the church as he went towards Eli's cottage; when he reached the gate he looked up the path, saw the door in the porch open, and a young lady coming out.

He recognised her—it was the vicar's daughter, Olive Havers. She saw him and beckoned to him to stop.

Olive Havers was a charming girl, of medium height, with brown wavy hair, a dainty figure, and bright fearless eyes, which looked straight at the person she was speaking to. She wore a large straw hat, with poppies on, and it was tied loosely under her chin with wide ribbons. She wore a light summer dress, which fitted her perfectly, showing her many charms unobtrusively. Danny was one of her favourites, he amused her, she laughed at his tales, and the queer descriptions he gave of life on the canal and the *Merry Belle*.

"When did you arrive, Danny?" she asked. "I do not think Eli expects you. I saw him this morning; but he will be very pleased to see you."

"We got in about a couple of hours back," said Dan.

"Then you have been a long time on the way."

"I met several folks in the village."

"And they wanted to hear all about your last trip?"

"Yes," said Dan, smiling.

"And a wonderful tale you told them, I'll be bound," said Olive.

"It's easy to make fun of them," said Dan.

"But you must not make fun of me," said Olive, shaking her finger at him.

"No," said Dan, looking serious. "I'll try not to."

"Will it be very hard work?"

"When I see you are interested I always like to please you," said Dan.

"But you must not sacrifice truth to please me."

"I'll never tell you untruths, Miss Olive, it's all gospel; maybe I stretch it a bit at times," said Dan.

The Cottage

11

She laughed as she said, "As you have been so long on the way I must not detain you; I am sure Eli would never forgive me for keeping you from him. He's very fond of you, Danny; I hope you will always behave well towards him.

"Yes, I will; he's been very good to me, his cottage has been my home for a long time. I've got something for him, it cost me three shillings."

"What is it, something useful?"

"Well, I don't know whether you'd think it useful—it's 'bacca."

Olive laughed as she said, "Eli is fond of his pipe; you are taking him a good supply."

"Josiah's raised my wages. He gives me five shillings a week now; I'm saving money."

"Well done, Danny," said Olive; "when you have saved a pound let me know, and perhaps I may be able to add to it."

"If you'll take care of it for me I'll be grateful," said Dan.

"I will be your banker, and you shall have fair interest," said Olive, smiling.

"What's interest?" asked Dan.

"If you put a pound in the bank you might get a shilling a year interest," said Olive.

"That's funny. Who pays the shilling?"

"The bankers."

"Then you'll be my banker?"

"With pleasure," said Olive.

"Fancy getting money without working for it," said Dan.

"Lots of people do that."

"I'd sooner work for mine," said Dan.

"Quite right, Danny," said Olive. "Work is best for all."

She bade him good-bye, and he walked on, wondering how a sovereign could become twenty-one shillings at the end of a year, merely by allowing it to lie in the hands of some one who would take care of it.

Eli's cottage was in a quiet spot standing back from the roadway, and at the rear a wood commenced that extended over a mile in the direction of Eagle Hurst. The cottage was built of bricks, which had become dull with age. The red tiled roof looked like the uneven lines of the sea rippling on a quiet surface when the sun gleams on it. The two upper windows, the glass cut diamond shape and fixed in metalwork, were almost half hidden by the overhanging roof. The surface of the walls was covered with single circles, connected by strips banded above and below. The two lower windows, one on either side of the doorway, were let into the brickwork, and were shaped like the others. The door was heavy, studded here and there unevenly with large nails; two long, wide iron hinges supported it, and the lock was curiously quaint and out of date, the key was large and heavy, and hung on the back of the door. The knocker was of twisted metal, the shape of a reaping-hook, with a knob at the point. Eli's garden was a source of never-ending enjoyment to him;

he spent hours in it, and worked slowly and carefully. The thick-set hedge, as broad as a fat sheep's back on the top, hid the garden from view, and it was not until visitors passing came and looked over that they were rewarded with a sight of gorgeous blooms. The hollyhocks and sunflowers towered above the hedge, and these attracted attention. Between the cottage and the roadway was a stretch of grass on which Eli's ducks and fowls were to be seen in the early morning searching for food; later in the day, as the sun became stronger, they migrated to leafy shades, remaining there until Eli's voice summoned them at feeding time. The fowls appeared to know the garden was forbidden ground for they seldom entered it; if a stray bird dared to intrude Eli drove it out, with much clattering and noise, the others regarding the intruder as an outcast, and refusing to allow it to re-enter the flock for a considerable time. All manner of gay flowers grew in Eli's front garden—blues and reds, mingled with yellows and orange and purple. White and pink flowers were almost smothered in a mass of sleek, slate-coloured leaves, which rose up from the root in an array of bristling spikes. Sweet-peas of varied hues clambered up and invaded the top of the hedge, sending forth a fragrance into the air which arrested wayfarers. Think of all the old-fashioned flowers by name and then mingle them together in assorted colours, and you have some idea of the variety in Eli's front garden. Almost buried in the thickness of the hedge was a wooden swing gate, which opened on to a small pathway leading to the cottage door. A dense box hedge, carefully trimmed, lined each side, terminating about a yard from the entrance. Clean smooth flags paved the ground, three or four feet wide, in front of the cottage, and here in summer, Eli was to be found, seated in a large oak arm-chair, with his cat on his knee and an old black retriever at his side.

At the back of the house was a small kitchen garden, and a little paddock in which Eli kept a goat for his milk supply. There were many old fruit trees, their trunks covered with knots and warts, their branches straggling and twisting like serpents—these were apple trees; the pear trees had a smoother, more even look, as though nature had stroked them gently and bidden them live easier lives. Beneath, ancient gooseberries and currants intermingled, while a few damsons were scattered about near the hedge. This was Eli Hind's cottage, and it went by no other name. He paid no rent, owing to the generosity of the squire, and the tax-gatherer and rate-collector never troubled him with unwelcome but necessary calls. It was a peaceable dwelling, and Eli loved it well.

CHAPTER III.

YOUTH AND AGE.

DAN peered through the gate and saw Eli sitting, half-dozing, in his chair; the heat made him drowsy, he had covered his head with a large handkerchief to keep off the busy flies. The boy carefully opened the gate and crept

down the path. Entering the cottage he placed his parcel of tobacco on the table, then slipped into a little room at the back, used as a scullery, to await events. It was slow work, and he had decided to rouse Eli when he heard a shuffling outside, and knew his grandfather was rousing himself. Eli whipped off the handkerchief, rubbed his eyes with it, looked round, and saw the gate open.

"I'm sure and certain it was shut when I dozed off," he said to himself. "Whos been here?"

Placing his hands on the sturdy arms of the chair, he raised himself, then taking up a heavy, crooked stick, went inside.

Dan, eagerly looking on, saw him finger the parcel suspiciously.

"What's this, I wonder; how came it here?" said Eli, as he turned it over two or three times. Carefully untying the knot, he took off the string, rolled it up and put it in his pocket.

"'Bacca!" he exclaimed delightedly, as he saw the name of his favourite mixture on the package. "It must have been Miss Olive. She's a kind-hearted lass, and very good to me. Yes, it must have been her. Bless me, there's half a pound," he said, as he handled it. "I'll not run short for a long time, and maybe that rascal Dan will bring me an ounce or two; good lad, Danny, a real good lad, but it doesn't do to spoil 'em—children should never be spoiled."

Dan put his tongue in his cheek and chuckled.

"I'll try a pipe," said Eli, "just to make sure the mixture's up to the mark. I wonder where Miss Olive got it. Some of these storekeepers are mighty cute, and not above doing a body if they're not sharp, and she knows nowt about 'bacca, I guess."

Eli filled his pipe, lit it, then puffed with satisfaction.

"It's the real stuff, and in better condition than Jarvis has it." Jarvis was the general storekeeper at Poolbank.

"Glad you like it," came a voice from the back, and Eli was so startled he almost dropped his pipe.

"Bless me, who's that?" he said. "Who's there?" he called.

"It's me, Eli, only me!" said Dan as he came forward. Eli stared at him in amazement.

"Where did you spring from?" he gasped.

Dan pointed to the scullery.

"I know; but how did you get in there without my hearing you?"

"You were fast asleep; any one might have run away with the cottage, you'd never have heard them. What's that?"

"'Bacca!" said Eli.

"What a heap of it; who left it?"

"Must 'a been Miss Olive; there's half a pound."

"I met her coming out of the church as I came through the-village; it couldn't have been her," said Dan.

Eli looked at him suspiciously; there was half a pound, so Dan could hardly have bought it.

"Is it good?" asked Dan.

"In grand condition."

"I thought it was," said Dan, who could not keep the secret longer.

"You?" exclaimed Eli. "You never bought all that?"

"Hum," said Dan.

"Certain sure, gospel?" said Eli.

"Hum."

"It must 'a cost three shillings."

"Hum."

"Where'd you get so much money from?"

"Josh raised my wages."

"Josh rais—well I'm blessed! What's come over the man?" said Eli.

"Five shillings a week I'm earning," said Dan proudly.

"Sakes alive, what a heap o' money for a kiddy!"

"He says I'm worth it."

"Bet your life on that, or Josh wouldn't have sprung," said Eli.

"He says I'm a little wonder," said Dan.

"Does he now? and what Josh says he means, I'll give him credit for that."

"I told Miss Olive."

"Ah! What did she say?"

"Said she'd be my banker when I'd saved a pound; she said something about interest. You put a pound in a bank and it turns into twenty-one shillings in a year; that's funny."

"That'll be her bank," said Eli. "There's some of 'em turns a pound into nothing if you don't keep an eye on 'em."

"I said the 'bacca was for you."

"She'd think it a waste to spend so much."

"She said you liked your pipe; I am sure she was glad I brought it you."

"You're a good lad, Danny, to remember the old man."

"You've done a lot for me," said Dan.

"Nay, lad, not much. You've helped yourself along since you've been with Josiah on the *Merry Belle*."

"But you sent me there."

"Nay, not me; it was Nancy wanted you, and sent him to ask. I was loath to part with you at first, before I made Josiah promise to behave well to you."

"And he has," said Dan.

"It's a queer life for a lad," said Eli; "maybe you could have done better."

"I like it," said Dan. "It's healthy, and I see plenty. I know a lot more than the lads in Poolbank."

"I've been wondering if Squire Foyle would give you a chance; you're fond of horses, a light weight, and there's plenty of room in his stables for a little chap like you."

Dan's eyes brightened, the prospect was alluring; it sounded too good to be true.

"The Squire's a friend of yours," said Dan; "you might speak for me."

"He's been generous, Dan, very generous; and so far as there may be friendship between the likes of him and the likes of me, there is; but he's a born gentleman, and I'm only a humble working man," said Eli.

"Josh says one man's as good as another," said Dan.

"Does he? Then you tell Josiah from me that he's a fool. Ask him if he considers a ragman as good as himself," said Eli.

Dan laughed. He knew Josiah had a pretty good opinion of himself.

"I'll ask him," he said.

"And don't forget to tell me what he says. One man ain't as good as another, Danny; don't you run away with that idea. There's as much difference between Squire Foyle and me as there is between one of his racers and Josiah's old mare."

Dan looked dubious. He had heard lectures in the cabin of the *Merry Belle* on the rights of man and the power of labour, but he kept Josiah's bellicose opinions to himself, he did not wish to trouble Eli with them.

"That old mare of Josh's is a wonder," said Dan.

"Is she? I thought her a bag o' skin and bones when I saw her. She's no credit to him or the *Merry Belle*. I wonder Nance stands it."

"Old Weather Glass would never get fat. She's a lean 'un, that's what she is."

"It's not her fault she's lean; she wants more inside her," growled Eli.

"Josh says she eats more than any horse or mare he ever had," said Dan.

"Then he gives her the wrong sort o' food. No mare as had decent feed would look like a skeleton," said Eli.

"She's a blood mare," said Dan, rather proud of the fact.

"Who stuffed you up with that yarn?" asked Eli.

"It's true; there's no stuffing about it."

"Nor the mare either, by the looks of her. Where did he get her?"

"Bought her at an auction at Barnet."

"Barnet Fair! No wonder they landed him with a screw."

"Weather Glass is no screw," said Dan. "I love the old mare: we're great pals. She knows everything I say to her; and, my word, she can jump."

"Eh!" exclaimed Eli. "Jump! Drat the lad, what next?"

"One moonlight night I tried her over the canal hedge. She took it standing. I let her have a good feed in the meadow."

"You rode her?"

"Yes, she went over easily. She deserved a good supper."

"At some one's expense," said Eli.

"A bit of grass would not be missed."

"You might have got into trouble. Does Josiah know?"

"No."

"Then don't do it aguin, or he'll lower your wages. What did you say her name is?"

"Weather Glass."

"That's a rum name."

"Josh called her Weather Glass because she always lets us know when there's rain about," said Dan.

"How?"

"It don't matter whether it's fine and sunny or not, if there's rain about she's always looking up at the sky and shaking her head."

Eli laughed as he said—

"I never heard the likes of that before."

"But she does it, and rain comes a few hours later, as certain as certain."

"He didn't give much for her, all the same," said Eli.

"Ten pounds; and she's done a good many ten pounds' worth of work for him."

"How old is she?"

"Josiah don't know; he puts her down at fifteen, but she's more like a score."

"He don't happen to have had her pedigree with her, I suppose," said Eli sarcastically.

"There you're wrong; he has, but he can't make head or tail of it. The auctioneer gave him a bit of paper with names on," said Dan.

Eli laughed as he said—

"And is he fool enough to believe it's correct?"

Dan shook his head; he had no notion of what Josiah believed, but he knew if any one doubted the mare's pedigree in his presence there would be a row, and Josiah knew how to hold his own on such occasions.

"Here we are a-talking and you've had no tea," said Eli. "Light the fire and make the kettle sing, lad; you'll find the tea in the old place."

By the time Dan had the water boiling, Eli had the table ready—a clean white cloth on, some jam, a new loaf, butter, and rich milk.

"You're not going back to-night, eh?" asked Eli.

"No; Josh said I could stay until morning. I'm to be aboard soon after six."

"What's he doing?"

"Unloading corn for the Eagle Hurst stables."

"I reckon that's a good job for him; the Squire pays well."

"This is fine jam," said Dan, smacking his lips. "Damson; I like damson jam."

"Made it myself," said Eli. "I'd a good crop last season, and the trees are showing well again this year."

"When I'm big I'd like a place like this," said Dan.

"It's comfortable for an old man like me, but for a newly-married couple with a young 'un coming regularly every year it would be cramped."

"I'm never going to be married; I'm too small. Josh says I'll not grow much more."

"He knows nothing about it," said Eli. "You'd better be small and decent-looking than grow up to be a big, rough, red-headed bear like him."

"He's kind to me," protested Dan.

"Well, well, let it be; I'm glad of it. When you've filled yourself with damson jam just feed the poultry, lad, while I smoke some of your 'bacca it's mighty sweet soothing stuff, so it is," said Eli.

CHAPTER IV

OLD WEATHER GLASS

NEXT morning Dan was about early. He fed the poultry, got his breakfast, and then went into Eli's room to bid him good-bye.

Eli was half dressed.

"Off so early?" he said. "What's the time?"

"Half-past five; I shall be aboard by six."

"Then you'll have to hurry up if you want any breakfast."

"I've had it; more jam, and all the milk's gone!"

"Bless my soul, you're an early bird, Danny; you'll get on in the world."

"Hope so," said Dan. "Good-bye, Eli. I'll come up next time we're at the lock, and don't forget the Squire."

"Th' Squire, what about him?"

"You were going to speak to him about getting me in the stable," said Dan.

"Oh, aye, so I was," said Eli. "And I'll do it first time I get speakin' with him."

"Tell him I can ride a bit and don't weigh much."

"I'll not forget, never fear."

Dan hurried down the road, through the village, and was on board the *Merry Belle* by six o'clock

"How's old Eli?" asked Josiah.

"Hearty."

"In a good temper?"

"Yes, he always is with me."

"Then he's different with other people; I've not found him an angel."

"But he likes you; he said you were a man of your word."

"So I am, and I'd like to hear the man as says different."

"Unloaded?" asked Dan.

"Yes; you got out of that."

"I can't carry sacks of corn, and I'll make up for it."

"Only my chaff, Dan. Fetch Weather Glass up."

"Where is she?"

"Jack Dent let me put her in his paddock for the night. I reckon she'll have had a good feed by this time."

"It'll fill her out a bit."

"Think she looks thin?" asked Josiah.

"Rather! What's your opinion?"

"I don't think a sackful of oats would fill out her sides," said Josiah.

Dan went off to the "Red Lion," kept by Jack Dent.

"Come for the mare?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"She's in the paddock. Say, Danny, does Josh feed her well?" asked Jack.

"Of course," answered Dan indignantly.

"He'd better get rid of her."

"Why?"

"Because if some of them inspectors see her, he'll be fined for working her in an unfit condition," said Jack.

"You'd better tell him so."

Jack laughed as he said, "Not me, it doesn't do to chaff Josh too much."

Dan went to the back of the house, climbed on to the paddock-gate, and whistled.

The old mare was feeding at the far end; there was a luxurious supply of grass, she seldom had such a pasture. She raised her head, recognised Dan, whinnied, and went on cropping; the temptation was too great, and she knew the whistle meant work.

Dan called her by name, and she tossed her head defiantly.

"It's no use, you've got to come," he said; "but I don't wonder at your not wishing to leave such a feed."

He slipped down the gate, walked towards her for some distance, then whistled again.

This time, seeing him in the paddock, she made the best of things, and came slowly towards him.

When they met Dan stroked her nose, took hold of her forelock, and let her out of the paddock; as he went through the "Red Lion" yard he thanked Jack Dent.

"Stop a minute," said Jack. "I want to have a look at her. She's got some good blood in her, I'll be bound; she's come down in the world, eh?"

"I think so," replied Dan. "She's no end of a sprit; she'd work until she dropped."

"Does Josh want to sell her?"

"I'll ask him," said Dan.

"If he wishes to part with her I'll take her off his hands. She wants turning out for six months. She'd be a different mare then."

When Dan reached the *Merry Belle* Josiah told him to put the nosebag on the mare, and come on board.

"Give her some oats," said Josiah. "There are some few left, spilt out of one of the bags; they said I could have them when they took the last lot away."

Dan thought Weather Glass had eaten plenty of grass to last her for some time, but gave her the oats as desired; he then went on board.

Nancy made inquiries about Eli, and said she must go and see him the next time they came to Poolbank.

Josiah came into the cabin. "It's a nuisance; we shall not be able to get away before this afternoon. The flour from the mill won't be all delivered before four o'clock."

"Weather Glass might as well have been left in the paddock," said Dan.

"Jack had her all night. I don't care to impose on good nature," said Josh.

"He looked her over in the yard as I came through," said Dan.

"Did he; and what had he to say?"

"Asked if you wanted to sell her."

"Oh! is he a buyer?"

"Said he'd make you an offer," said Dan.

"He'll have to make a tidy bid if he wants her," said Josh. "Nance, my girl, I fancy there's money in the old mare."

"I hope so," she answered. "Perhaps if her pedigree was known you'd be able to get a good price for her."

"I have her pedigree right enough, the auctioneer had it all pat; he told me there was no doubt about it."

"How came she to Barnet Fair?" asked Dan.

"I heard she was sold by mistake somehow, in the first instance. A lot of mares were being drafted out of a stud, and she was put in with the rest. They were in poor condition and brought low prices; many of them were old."

"Let me look at the paper," said Dan.

Josiah stared at him, then said—

"What does a youngster like you know about such things?"

"Not much," said Dan; "but I recollect the names of a lot of horses, and I often look at the sporting papers when I step into the 'Red Lion,' and other places."

Nancy shook her head reprovingly, at the same time smiling at him as he asked—

"Where's the harm?"

"No harm at all, lad," said Josiah. "You'd much better read sporting news than a lot of filthy rubbish about divorces and police-court cases."

"So he had," said Nance. "I can't abide 'em."

Josiah winked at Dan as he said—

"That's the part of the paper interests ladies, so I've heard."

"Then you've heard wrong," snapped Nancy, who felt guilty, and consequently uneasy.

"Never mind, Nance," said Josh. "Even if you do glance 'em over, you've too much sense to be corrupted by 'em."

"I should think so, indeed," she said hotly. "Get the paper and show it him," she added, to change the subject.

Josiah had an iron-bound oak locker in the cabin. He unlocked it, pulled out several papers, eventually finding the one he was searching for.

"That's it, I think," he said, as he held it up.

Dan asked for it, and Josiah passed it over.

"I can't make it out, and I don't suppose you'll be able to," he said.

Dan spread it out on the table.

"That's funny," he said.

"What?" asked Josiah.

"Her name's Storm."

"Is it? I thought we'd agreed to call her Weather Glass."

"Yes, so we have; but when she was sold to you her name was Storm; they go well together, the old name and the new."

"Never mind about her name, one's as good as another. What about her pedigree?"

"It's plain enough," said Dan. "She's by Hurricane out of Meadow Land, by Promised Land out of Bluebell, by——"

"Here, hold on a bit," said Josiah, laughing, as Dan reeled off the names as though accustomed to read pedigrees easily.

Dan looked up.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "That's written down here, and a lot more."

"But what's all that about Hurricanes, Meadows, and Bluebells, and such-like?" asked Josiah.

"Hurricane is the sire of Storm—I mean Weather Glass—and her dam is Meadow Land, who is by Promised Land," said Dan.

"That's what you call a pedigree, is it?"

"Yes; it's like I've read in the papers, and there's been a lot of good horses by Hurricane and his sons."

"You don't say so!" said Josiah, astonished at Dan's knowledge, while Nancy looked on approvingly, although she did not understand it in the least. It sounded grand to hear Dan saying these big words so easily.

"Hurricane's stock fetched a lot of money," said Dan.

"How do you know?"

"I've read about 'em; I'm fond of it."

"Where can we get a paper and have a look?" asked Josiah.

"At the shop," said Dan; "but there may be nothing in."

"I'll chance it; go and get one," said Josiah.

Dan went, and quickly came back with the sporting paper.

"Why, look here!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"What is it?" asked Josiah eagerly, as he snatched the paper, searching up and down its columns, finding nothing of interest.

"Here," said Dan, pointing to the pedigree of the winner of the Wokingham Stakes at Ascot.

Josiah stared at the tabulated form.

"I can't make sense of it," he said.

"Rainbow, the winner of the race," said Dan, "he's by Thunder, and he's by Hurricane."

"You don't say so; and my old mare's by Hurricane!"

"Yes," said Dan; "and she's too good to be pulling the *Merry Belle* along a canal."

"What do you say?" roared Josiah, startling Nancy so that she dropped her needlework, while Dan slipped off his stool.

"Too good for the *Merry Belle*, my boat, the best boat on the canal! Too

good for her, is she? Perhaps you're not satisfied with the boat? Maybe you'd like a yacht, or a man-o'-war—or——"

"Goodness gracious, Josiah, don't be so fearsome," said Nancy, "you frighten the life out of a body. The lad meant no harm, I'm sure."

Josiah was still fuming and muttering "not good enough for the *Merry Belle*," when Dan said quietly—

"We all know your boat is the best. I didn't intend anything. I meant Weather Glass was too well bred for her work, and that she might be sold for a good sum of money, that's all."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said Josiah, only half satisfied. "Let me tell you no horse is too well bred to pull my boat. If so be as Weather Glass is all you say she is, then the better for me. I mean to keep her, and if Jack Dent comes nosing round after her I'll keep him at arm's length. Jack thinks he's clever, but he'll find I'm equal to him any day."

"Don't you lose that paper, any way," said Dan.

"This pedigree?"

"Yes; it may come in handy," said Dan. "Do you recollect the name of the auctioneer who sold her to you?"

"It's on the back of the paper."

Dan turned it over and read, "'Jacob Jewell, auctioneer.' There's no address," he said.

"Never mind that: he's always at Barnet Fair, has been for years, and heaps of people know him," said Josiah.

CHAPTER V

DAN'S DAY DREAMS

ALTHOUGH Dan enjoyed the life on the *Merry Belle* he was anxious to better himself. Young as he was he saw very little prospect of getting on in life on a canal-boat. He constantly read about lads being apprenticed to trainers of race-horses, and being small and a light-weight, considered he ought to have a chance in that direction. If Eli saw Squire Foyle, and mentioned the matter to him, it might be a step in the desired direction.

Sometimes Dan rode Weather Glass for a few miles; he was light, and made but little difference to her.

"Looks like a bit of a monkey perched up there," said Josiah to his wife, nodding in the direction of the mare.

"He is a little fellow; I wonder if he will grow," she said.

"Not much, I reckon; he's one of the small sort, but there's plenty of bigger fellows haven't got half his pluck."

"You're fond of him, Josh?"

"I'd be sorry to part with the lad; but he'll not be with us long," he said.

"Why not?" asked Nancy, unpleasantly startled.

"Because he's dreaming about other things. I've watched him; he's got summat in his head, depend upon it."

"He's well off here, and happy."

"Oh, aye, he's all that," said Josh.

"Then why should he wish for a change?"

"Ask him; maybe he'll tell you."

Nancy took an early opportunity to sound Dan.

"Are you glad you came on the *Merry Belle*?" she asked.

"Of course," said Dan surprised. "Have you any reason to think the contrary?"

"You seem to be dreaming about something, most of your spare time."

"I've been thinking."

"Well, thinking, then; what about?" she asked.

"Don't think me ungrateful," said Dan. "Indeed, I am not; but I'd like to get in a big training stable, and learn to be a jockey."

"That would mean leaving the boat."

"Yes."

"Shouldn't you miss us?"

"Very much."

"Then why leave?"

"Because there's not much chance for me here."

"Josh has got on well."

"He's big and strong; look at me, I'm so very small."

"You might have a boat of your own in time," she said.

He shook his head as he replied—

"That's not likely. Where's the money to come from?"

Nancy was unable to say, but hoped he would not think of leaving for a long time.

"It all depends," said Dan. "I've asked Eli to speak to the Squire about me."

"Well I never!" exclaimed Nancy. "And will he?"

"Yes, when he sees him."

Nancy told Josiah what passed between them, to which he merely replied—

"I thought so, and I don't blame him. This game is pretty near played out, my girl; canal boats are well-nigh a thing of the past, they're going out of fashion, too slow for the times. It's a pity, when there's so many miles of water-way to be worked."

"There'll be boats while there's water," said Nancy.

"Like enough; but them as works 'em will only make a bare living," said Josiah.

It was a warm evening, and the *Merry Belle* was laid up for the night. A faint curl of smoke came from the small chimney rising above the deck, and Nancy was below preparing supper. Weather Glass was nibbling bits from the hedge, waiting for Dan's arrival with her bag. Josiah lay on the deck, his back propped against the side, smoking his pipe; he eyed Dan over as he came out of the hold with the mare's feed.

Dan whistled merrily and did not see Josh, who called out—

"Don't overfeed her; you spoil her, she's getting too spirited."

Dan laughed as he answered, "Not much fear of that; she works too hard."

"Fond of horses, ain't you, Dan?"

"I am that; they're beautiful creatures."

"Call Weather Glass a beauty?" laughed Josh.

"When you come to look her over, she's full of good points."

"Not much doubt about that, she's all points; some of the fellows at Glossop's call her 'the pointer.'"

"Much they know about horses," said Dan.

"Nance tells me you'd like to be a jockey."

Dan fidgeted uneasily, first standing on one foot, then on the other.

"Is it true?" asked Josh.

"True enough, but I don't see much chance of it."

"Why, you're just the sort for a rider."

"Do you think so?" asked Dan eagerly.

"I've said so; that's enough. When are you going to cut adrift?"

"I'm not going to cut adrift. I'm fond of the *Merry Belle*, and I'll stop here until something turns up."

"The mare's waiting for you," said Josiah, and Dan went on to the towing-path.

When he had fixed the nose-bag he scrambled through the hedge into the field and lay down on the grass. How quiet and peaceful everything was around him; the air was soft and sweet, the birds whistled and sang their evening songs, cattle lowed, and there was the bleating of sheep; many sounds floated around him, the buzz of insects, the chirp of field crickets, in the distance the tones of a clock striking were heard. Dan felt the soothing influence of his surroundings; such scenes as this were well worth remembering, and he had enjoyed many. His thoughts wandered to Pool-bank and Eli's cottage; he wondered what his grandfather was doing, whether he had fallen asleep in his chair or gone to bed. If the Squire took an interest in him he might be sent to Newmarket, where the horses were trained. What was Newmarket like? It must be a fine place; there were hundreds of thoroughbreds there, and also hundreds of lads like himself. What chance would he have in such a crowd? He had confidence in himself; if he got an opportunity he'd make the most of it.

Dan rolled over, stuck his elbows in the ground, rested his chin on his hands, and contemplated the smoke from the *Merry Belle's* cabin chimney.

Nancy was down there cooking something appetising for the evening meal. He regarded her almost as a mother, and his eyes became moist as he thought of parting from her. Whatever happened, he would never forget Josiah and Nancy. One day he might become a great jockey; he had read about the large sums they earned, and if he had money he could help Josiah, and buy Nancy handsome presents, and Eli no end of things he liked, and he'd get Miss Olive the best Prayer Book and Bible that money could buy; somehow he always associated her with these books, it seemed natural. There was not much of the Prayer Book or hymn-book about her brother Cecil Havers. He did not like Cecil; on one occasion the young man had administered a severe chastisement, which Dan considered undeserved. As

he lay, building castles in the air, he heard Josh calling him, and feeling hungry, all his visions of future prosperity vanished, and he hurried on board.

"Ready for supper?" asked Nancy with a bright smile.

Dan looked at the big dish of sausages and potatoes and smacked his lips; the cabin seemed more comfortable than usual this evening, perhaps it was because he had thought about leaving it. There was a momentary tinge of regret, but it did not spoil his healthy appetite, and he set to with a will.

It was so hot later on that Dan rolled himself up in an old rug and slept in the open; at four o'clock he awoke. It was a brilliant morning; there had hardly been any night, and looking up he saw Weather Glass cropping grass by the hedge side.

Josiah and Nancy were still asleep, but in a few minutes he heard a sound which denoted the former was preparing for the day's work.

"Hurry up, Dan," said Josh, "we ought to be on our way a morning like this: it's the best part of the day before the sun gets hot."

"I'm ready," said Dan, as he disappeared over the side of the barge. He quickly hitched the towing-rope to the swingle, and the mare started the *Merry Belle*. The canal here was wider than in some parts, and the bow of the boat sent ripples eddying away to the bank on either side. Dan walked behind the mare, dancing along, whistling, clapping his hands to startle the birds. He inhaled the pure air of the morning, it was like being on enchanted land; he thought of some of the children in the slums in the large towns he had visited, and was thankful for his freedom from smoke, dirt, and crowded misery. Presently there was a blot on the fair landscape, a dirty, black barge met the *Merry Belle*. Two wretched horses, driven by a barefooted lad, whose clothes were in tatters, came along. Dan knew the boy and pitied him; his taskmaster was a terrible man, a drunkard and a ruffian. At present Dan heard him snoring in a sodden sleep on the barge. Everything about the boat denoted dirt and misery; the thin, poorly clad lad on the towing-path had not been washed for days, judging by his appearance.

"How goes it, Jimmy?" said Dan.

"Bad; look here," said the lad, and showed Dan a big bruise on his arm above the elbow. "He nearly broke it last night," he said.

"Hungry?" asked Dan.

"Rather?"

When Dan went on to the towing-path in the early morning he generally put some bread and cheese in his pocket; on this occasion he pulled it out and handed it to the lad, who thanked him and commenced to devour it ravenously, glancing from time to time at the slumberer on the barge.

The two boats presented a strange contrast as they passed, and old Weather Glass seemed to avoid the broken-down pair of horses as she pushed close into the hedge.

Josiah saw the master of the other barge asleep and heard his snores.

"Filthy brute!" he muttered, "it's the likes of him give our trade a

bad name. He's a bad lot; pity he can't roll off and drown, nobody'd miss him, least of all that poor little beggar driving them two scarecrows."

The *Merry Belle* was soon out of sight, round a bend in the canal, and Dan breathed more freely, the grimy boat poisoned the atmosphere; he had a lot to be thankful for in having such a good master as Josiah, and a motherly soul like Nancy to look after him, not to mention the cleanliness and comfort of the *Merry Belle*.

He could not, however, rid himself of that look on Jimmy's face, or forgot the way in which he ate the bread and cheese.

"He was starving," thought Dan. "If ever I get a chance I'll help him. There's hundreds like him on the boats, they say. I'd like to do something for the lot; some day, perhaps, I may."

Josiah knew there were many men as bad, if not worse, as the master of the barge they had just passed. He hated them one and all, and frequently came into contact with them in a way they did not like. Nancy was sometimes frightened Josiah would come to some harm through these ruffians. They scowled at her, and shook their fists at Josiah behind his back. She had heard muttered threats against him, and warned him, but he laughed at her fears, saying he was not afraid of the cowards. He was not; but cowards attack honest men when the odds are in their favour.

Josiah held himself aloof from these men as much as possible, but there were times when he had to assert his authority, but then they generally went to the wall.

Men had been found drowned in the canal, and Nancy was nervous when she heard of such things. Josiah feared no man or men, and while admiring him for it, she knew in that lay his peril.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUIRE AND ELI.

HENRY COLBERT FOYLE, of Eagle Hurst, member of Parliament for his county, Southern Division, Master of the Hounds, owner of a long string of race-horses, and known in Poolbank as The Squire, was a man nearing sixty years of age; many people would have put him down as fifty. He was, on the whole, a popular man, despite a somewhat short temper and an abrupt manner of speech. He had been twice married and twice a widower; his second wife had one child, a boy of eighteen, when he married her. She was an American, rich, good-looking, fond of gaiety and admiration, and their eight years of married life had not passed pleasantly. Henry Foyle had a large fortune, and had no objection to his wife leaving the bulk of her money to her son; it relieved him to a certain extent of responsibility.

Edwin Swinton, his stepson, was not a favourite of the Squire's, nor did he make much effort to secure the good opinion of his stepfather. When his mother married he came to live at Eagle Hurst, and in time became the main cause of disagreement between husband and wife. He had no occupation, and Squire Foyle detested idleness. When he urged upon Edwin the

desirability of engaging in some useful work, the young man scouted the idea, and his mother encouraged him.

"He will come to no good," said the Squire. "It will be far better for him to have something to do."

"He can help you," she replied.

"In what way?"

"To manage your estates or race-horses."

Squire Foyle smiled; he had not much faith in his stepson.

Although he had no liking for Edwin Swinton, he raised no objections to his residing at Eagle Hurst, and when his wife died her son still continued to live there.

Henry Foyle allotted Edwin rooms in the house, which he alone occupied, and they saw very little of each other. Gradually young Swinton became more and more attracted to London, and Eagle Hurst saw but little of him; his rooms, however, were kept for him, and the servants had orders to attend to his wants.

Eagle Hurst was a large mansion standing in the midst of a spacious park, whose ancient oak trees were famous throughout the land. Some portions of it were very old, and the almost ruined walls bore the marks of cannon-balls fired by Cromwell's artillery, when Eagle Hurst was held by a Foyle for King Charles. This part of the building had been repaired where possible, but the new mansion was built in front, and hid it from view from the drive.

A very old family the Foyles, standing high in the county, although none of them had ever received titles. It was said that Charles the Second, who generally forgot his father's friends, had, as usual, behaved badly to Foyle of Eagle Hurst at the Restoration. Instead of loading a loyal subject with honours, enriching and ennobling him, he neglected him, and left him to live on the scanty income saved from the wars. Since that time, the Foyles, generation after generation, had refused to accept any title from their sovereigns. The restorer of the fortunes of the family was Bernard Foyle, who was a successful merchant in the City of London, and made vast sums of money during the devastating years of war with France. His son increased the fortunes of the house when Napoleon's career was broken at Waterloo, and later on another Foyle, by skilful management of his capital, amassed a large sum in the business. Eventually, when Henry Colbert Foyle became owner of Eagle Hurst, he retired from any active participation in the management of the house, although he held the lion's share of the capital of the Company, which was successfully floated for over half a million of money. In addition to this he had a large private fortune, and possessed many thousands of acres in various parts of England.

When ill-natured people said he married the beautiful widow of Edwin Swinton, of New York, for her money, he could afford to smile, for his wealth was far greater than his wife's.

Henry Foyle was a lonely man at Eagle Hurst, but the large mansion did not depress him, and he kept the many rooms always ready for occupa-

tion. He entertained lavishly in the hunting and shooting season, and the house parties at Eagle Hurst were always considered delightful. His hostess, on such occasions, was his married sister, Mrs. Winifred Wharnccliffe, whose husband Montague Wharnccliffe, was the active head of Foyle, Wharnccliffe, and Company, Limited.

If there was one man whose society he enjoyed more than that of any other, it was Montague Wharnccliffe. A man of integrity, of rare business acumen, and a thorough sportsman, Montague Wharnccliffe at once attracted the owner of Eagle Hurst ; and no one was more delighted than Henry Foyle when his sister, Winifred, selected his old college chum for her husband. The friendship between the two men had been unbroken since the time when they were at Cambridge together. Wharnccliffe was always a better all-round athlete than Foyle, but the latter beat him when it came to riding and shooting.

Henry Foyle, once he gave a man his friendship unreservedly, always stood by him, and it was owing to his influence that Montague Wharnccliffe became chief partner and active head of the huge London house.

The Poolbank villagers always welcomed Mrs. Wharnccliffe's arrival at Eagle Hurst. It generally meant a full house and a liberal scattering about of money by the guests.

The village belonged almost entirely to the estate, and the men employed at Eagle Hurst were always sure of a comfortable cottage and a pension when they became too old to work.

The Squire had his favourites, and old Eli Hind was one of them. Eli had worked at Eagle Hurst in Henry Foyle's father's time, and had known the Squire from a boy.

When it became evident that Eli was past work, although he denied it, Henry Foyle said—

"You have done your share of labour, Eli. Pick out the cottage you like best in Poolbank, and you shall have it and a pound a week as long as you live."

Eli was overwhelmed at the Squire's generosity, and his thanks were profuse.

"No thanks, please," said the Squire. "You have honestly earned it by over fifty years of toil, and I want you to be comfortable in your old age."

Eli selected his cottage, and settled down to end his days in peace.

"You ought to have some one to look after you—a woman to clean the place for you," said Henry Foyle to him about a month after he entered into possession.

"Nay, Squire, beggin' your pardon ; I want no women about me, I'd sooner do for myself," said Eli, at which Henry Foyle laughed and let him have his way.

Some weeks after Dan had been to see Eli, Squire Foyle was riding past and saw Eli at the gate ; reining in the horse he asked the old man how his health was.

"I've much to be thankful for," said Eli touching his cap. "I don't recollect the time when I was ill, and thanks be to you, Squire, I've everything I want."

"Then there is nothing I can do for you?" said Henry Foyle.

Eli suddenly recollected Dan, and his offer to speak to the Squire.

"Well, there is something," began Eli.

Mr. Foyle smiled.

"What is it, Eli? Don't be afraid."

"Nay, I'm none afraid of you, Squire, though I've heard some folks are."

Mr. Foyle laughed as he said, "Only evil-doers need fear me, Eli; go on!"

"It's about Danny," said Eli. "He's my grandson. He's thirteen or thereabouts, and he works on Josiah Fudge's barge, the *Merry Belle*. He's a good lad, though I say it, and he's small. Josiah says he's a little wonder for his size. He's had his wages raised—he gets five shillings a week, and he brought me half a pound of as good 'bacca as a man need smoke."

Mr. Foyle smiled as he listened to Eli rambling on about Dan's good qualities.

"And what is it you wish to ask me about this wonderful little fellow?" he said.

"Don't think Danny's dissatisfied with his work—not a bit of it; but he's that fond of 'osses he's fairly mad about ridin' and racin', and such like. It'll be the ruin of him, but he says no," said Eli.

"Dan says no, does he? Well, I agree with him. Riding and racing are healthy occupations; there is a good deal more harm going on in the City of London than on Newmarket Heath, or our racecourses. What is it the lad wants?"

"If I may make so bold as to ask you, he wants to have a chance in the Eagle Hurst stables," said Eli glancing sideways at Mr. Foyle's face.

"A little fellow, you say?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"About so high," said Eli, holding his hand about a foot from the top of the gate.

Mr. Foyle laughed as he said—

"That is very small indeed; he would not be much use at Eagle Hurst I am afraid—among the hunters."

"No, I thought not; he's well off where he is," said Eli, not at all disappointed; he thought Dan was getting on in life with five shillings a week.

"I'll see what I can do for him," said Mr. Foyle. "I shall not forget, but you may remind me again, Eli; or better still, I will see the lad myself some day."

"Thank you kindly, Squire," said Eli, watching him as he rode on.

"He's a fine gentleman, he is," mused Eli. "If there were more men like him there'd be less crying out about hard times and bad masters. I've known him since he was a lad, and never found a fault in him. Some on 'em say he's short in his temper and snaps at folks; but I've never seen it, and I speak of a man as I find him. He comes of a good old stock, and I'd sooner work for a man with summat behind him than for one of them new-fangled millionaires as hardly knows their father's and mother's names. It's men like Squire Foyle as looks after old 'uns like me, when we're broken down and can't work. God bless him!"

The Squire did not hear old Eli's benediction, but it went after him and hovered over him as he rode along.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE HOUNDS

WHEN the hunting season commenced Dan was always glad to get back to Poolbank on the off chance of seeing the hounds meet on the village green. Life on the canal was not so pleasant as in the summer time, and it was too cold to lie in the open listening to the birds, and dreaming of another life in the years to come.

Eli had told Dan he had spoken to the Squire, but it was not an encouraging account of the result of the interview : nevertheless the boy's hopes were not cast down, and his wish to learn riding was as strong as ever.

Nancy was glad to hear no more from Dan about leaving the *Merry Belle*, for she would have been lonely without him. Josiah, however, knew he was uneasy, only waiting for an opportunity to "cut adrift," as he called it.

Dan scanned the hunting fixtures whenever he had the chance, and in November found the hounds were to meet at Poolbank village the day before the *Merry Belle* would arrive at the lock. This was disappointing ; it meant he would lose the chance of seeing them.

He was driving Weather Glass, and they made such good progress that Josiah said to his wife—

"Dan's pushing ahead ; we shall be at Poolbank in the morning instead of the afternoon."

"It's cold on the path," she replied : "he goes fast to keep warm."

"More like he's got something ahead at Poolbank," growled Josiah.

They had travelled so well that the next morning Dan thought if the hounds happened to run in the direction of Brinxton Woods he might see them after all.

He was on the towing-path, and meant to keep a sharp look out.

Weather Glass seemed full of metal, and capered about like a young 'un, much to Dan's amusement, and Josiah said the old mare was as lively as a kitten.

They were detained at the lock before Poolbank, and Dan slipped the gear off Weather Glass, to ease her and give her a feed. Having done this he climbed on to her back, the better to survey the scene and chaff with the other boys.

They bandied words for some time, when one of the lads shouted excitedly—

"Look yonder, there's the hounds !"

"Where?" said Dan, switching round so suddenly that he almost fell off the mare. Clutching at her head-gear to save himself, he pulled the strap undone, and the nose-bag fell on the towing path.

This startled her. She threw up her head and became restive. Dan deftly slipped the bit in her mouth, made it fast, and drew the reins tight.

Weather Glass, however, appeared uneasy. She sniffed the air, tossed her head, and moved from side to side, until Dan thought to himself—

"I believe she scents the hounds."

Josiah called Nancy, who hurried on deck.

"They must be Foyle's hounds," said Josiah; "it's their country. I reckon they go further than Brinxton Woods, and they're about two miles away."

"Poolbank hounds right enough," said Nancy, excitedly.

The hounds were in full cry, streaming along after a "little brown patch" scudding across the field at a great pace. The riders came in view; half a dozen, then more, until the whole field was in sight. It was a glorious picture, such as can only be seen to perfection in a good hunting county. Everybody at the lock and on the bank watched them. Dan, perched on the back of Weather Glass, had the best view.

The old mare heard the sound of galloping hoofs as they drew nearer; she snorted, pricking her ears.

Dan patted her neck and said to himself—

"I wish we were with them."

The fox headed for the canal, then suddenly swerved and bore straight for Brinxton; this move brought hounds and huntsmen nearer to the towing-path.

Weather Glass had nothing on but the bridle, and Dan on her back.

Without warning she whipped round, almost throwing Dan off. She caught sight of the horses galloping at top speed, and the "blue blood" coursed through her veins again.

Dan anticipated her next move, and was delighted. The mare looked over the low hedge separating the towing-path from the field, measured it, then jumped it easily. Her rider being ready for this sat her comfortably.

"Saks alive, Nance, the mare's over the fence!" exclaimed Josiah.

"And Dan's gone with her; however did he stick on!" gasped Nancy.

There were a dozen people about, and they gave a cheer as they saw Weather Glass clear the hedge and gallop after the field.

"It's Josh Fudge's old mare," said the lock-keeper; "bless me if it ain't! Who'd a thought old 'pointer' had it in her!"

"Allus thought her were a good bred 'un," said a farm hand standing by. Josiah burst into a roar of laughter, then he said—

"This beats cock-fightin'!" It was a favourite expression. "Dan and Weather Glass 'll be in at the death if they goes on at yon pace."

"I hope he comes to no harm," said Nancy.

"Harm! Dan come to harm on her! Never you fear it. She'll carry him safe enough, and he'll stick on; see if he don't," said Josiah.

When Dan realised what he was in for he laughed and enjoyed the fun. It was useless to try and stop Weather Glass now her blood was up, and he made no desperate attempt. The mare warmed to her work, and soon settled down into a long, easy stride, which showed she had not forgotten how to gallop. She was in the rear of the field, but Dan saw that if the pace continued she would quickly gain on the others.

He stuck close to her and never troubled about being minus a saddle. He felt more secure without.

They neared a stiff fence. Dan wondered if she would face it, and if so whether he could stick on.

Weather Glass gave him his cue. There was to be no shirking. She went straight at it, and having such a light weight on her back jumped it easily. Dan kept his seat with an effort. In the distance he saw Brinxton Woods. This was where the fox was making for. There was no doubt about Weather Glass finishing, and Dan wondered what they would all think of him when he rode up. A pretty figure he would cut amongst all those red and black coats, top hats, and fine ladies. There was no help for it, had he wished to avoid it, which he did not.

They lost the fox somewhere near the wood, and the followers of the hunt had time to rest their horses. They stood in groups, chatted about the splendid run the fox had given them, and the majority were glad he had saved his brush this time. Mr. Foyle was talking to Montague Wharnccliffe and one or two others, well-known members of the hunt, when he caught sight of Dan on Weather Glass galloping towards them. He laughed heartily as he said, pointing him out, "What have we here, a new member of the hunt? Where on earth did the pair spring from? The horse gallops well."

There was a burst of laughter as they saw Dan coming along on old Weather Glass.

When he drew near to the first group of horsemen he tried to pull Weather Glass up, but in vain. On she went, and seemed bound to run straight into Mr. Foyle and his friends, when one of the whips dashed up and caught him by the bridle, asking Dan, in not very polite language, what he meant by this mad prank. Then, as the man recognized him, he said, with a laugh—

"Oh! it's you, is it, Dan? How the deuce came you here?"

"She brought me," said Dan, pointing to his mount.

Mr. Foyle came up and said: "Well, youngster, what are you doing here?"

His tone was not unkind, and Dan plucked up his courage.

"It's not my fault, Squire," he said. "I was sitting on her back, on the towing-path, when she caught sight of the hunt, pricked up her ears, and jumped the fence."

"You stuck on."

"Yes, I can ride a bit. When she got going I couldn't stop her, and she brought me here. My, what a gallop we've had; it's rare fun!"

Mr. Foyle and those near him laughed at Dan's evident pleasure in his exploit.

"Who are you, my lad?" asked the Squire, looking from Dan to the mare.

"I'm Dan Hind, old Eli's grandson, sir; and I'm with Josiah Fudge on the *Merry Belle*."

"So you're Eli's lad, are you? He spoke to me about you," said the Squire. "Who owns the mare?"

"Josiah, sir."

"Where did he pick her up?"

"At Barnet Fair."

"And she pulls the canal boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"She's too good for that; she looks well bred."

"So she is, sir : she's by Hurricane out of Meadow Land, by Promised Land out of——"

"Stop," said the Squire, laughing ; "you are strong on pedigrees, my lad. How do you know she's by Hurricane?"

"Josiah has her pedigree."

"It may be all wrong."

"He says not ; he knows the man as gave it him."

"Then she's a blood mare. It's strange ; what's her name?"

"Weather Glass we call her, but her real name's Storm."

Mr. Foyle looked surprised : he had heard of Storm. She was a good racer, but failed at the stud ; he remembered he had heard of her being sold some years before, but had almost forgotten the circumstances. Before he had time to reply another fox was found, and he called out to Dan, as he turned his horse's head : "Tell Fudge to wait for me at Poolbank to-morrow, I want to see him about that mare, and about you."

This was good news for Dan ; it made his heart beat fast. What did the Squire mean to do ? "He wants to see Josh about me and the mare," said Dan. "I'll not forget that me sage, anyway."

Weather Glass's gallop proved sufficient ; she showed no desire to follow it up by another, so that when Dan turned her head for the lock she offered no objections.

He did not hurry back, but let the mare go her own pace. When he came in sight, Josiah and the rest gave him another cheer.

"I'm glad he's not angry," thought Dan.

He took the mare through a gate, and as he rode up to the lock was surrounded by eager questioners.

Later on he said to Josiah—

"I'm glad you took it all right. I don't think I could have pulled her up : she's a rare one to gallop."

Josiah smiled ; he had his doubts about Dan pulling very hard.

"What do you think?" said Dan.

"Anything happened?" asked Josiah.

"The Squire spoke to me ; he asked me about the mare. He wants to see you to-morrow at Poolbank."

"What for?"

"To speak to you about the mare, and——"

"And what?"

"Me," said Dan.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARE AND THE BOY

As Josiah was standing in front of the "Red Lion" a groom from Eagle Hurst rode up

"Squire Foyle wishes to see you at the house : when can you come and bring Dan Hind with you?" he said

"That means a day's work lost," grumbled Josiah, "it's a fair step to Eagle Hurst."

The man laughed as he replied—

"You'll find it a profitable day's work, I fancy; more so than if you remained here."

"I dare say," said Josiah; "but there's my customers to think about, and I'm generally up to time."

"When will you start?"

"In half an hour," said Josiah. "Tell Mr. Foyle we'll be there this morning. Have a glass?" he asked.

The groom accepted his offer, and Jack Dent brought the beer out.

"Here's good luck."

"Same to you," said Josiah.

When Josiah went back to the *Merry Belle* he told his wife the Squire had sent for them.

"It means we'll lose Danny," he said.

"If it's for the lad's good we ought to be satisfied," she said; "but we'll miss him sorely."

Dan could not conceal his delight, and Nancy looked at his happy face wistfully. As they were putting on their best clothes she called out—

"Be sure and call on Eli as you go past."

"All serene," answered Josiah. "We can't leave the old man out of the bargain: he spoke to the Squire about Dan."

Josiah looked quite spruce in his rough grey suit and bowler hat. Nancy fixed his tie in position, then turned him round for inspection.

"You'll do very well when I've given you a brush," she said.

Dan made his appearance, looking neat but very small, in a snuff-coloured coat and dark trousers.

Nancy brushed their clothes and gave them a parting warning not to kick up the mud and splash themselves from head to foot.

"Shouldn't wonder if we get a lift on the road," said Josiah. "There's the miller's cart at the 'Red Lion.'"

"If you ride in it you'll be smothered in flour," said Nancy.

"Then they'll have to dust us before we see the Squire," said Josiah.

They stepped out briskly, Dan trotting to keep up with his companion's long strides. As they passed the "Red Lion" the driver of the miller's cart asked where they were going, and hearing they were bound for Eagle Hurst said he would give them a lift to the top of the village.

"There's some new sacks to sit on; you'll not get floured," he said.

Josiah lifted Dan into the cart, then swung himself up.

"This will give us a three-mile lift, it's better than walking," he said, as he sat down on a bundle of sacks, Dan following his example. The driver put them down about a hundred yards from Eli's cottage.

"He's inside; he don't like November weather," said Josiah.

They opened the gate; before knocking Josiah looked in at the window, but saw no sign of Eli.

"He's up, I reckon," he said.

"If he's not, there's something wrong with him," said Dan.

Josiah knocked at the door, and they heard Eli stumping across the room, tapping with his stick.

"Both of you?" said Eli, as he opened the door. "Come inside; I'm glad to see you."

"We can't stop," said Josiah. "We're bound for Eagle Hurst; the Squire sent for us. Nancy said we must call and ask how you were doing."

"She's a good lass is Nancy. You were lucky to get her, Josh."

"A bit o' luck both ways," he answered laughingly.

"She might 'a done better, but I don't see as how you could," said Eli.

"What are you goin' to see the Squire about?"

Josiah explained; he gave an account of Dan's exploit on Weather Glass, which amused Eli vastly.

"Let me know all about it when you come back," said Eli, as they took their departure.

"It's a fine place is this," said Josiah, as they walked up the long, tree-lined drive to the house. "We'll go round to the stables first."

"Yes," said Dan, who was somewhat overawed by his surroundings.

They entered the stable-yard, where they saw the groom who had ridden to the "Red Lion" that morning.

"I'll tell them to let Squire Foyle know you're here," he said.

They had not long to wait, in a few minutes they were beckoned to the house, and conducted to the Squire's business room. He looked up as they entered, and said, "Sit down; I'll attend to you in a moment. I am just finishing a letter."

Dan looked round the room, but there was nothing to attract his attention; had he been in the Squire's study, or the library, he would have seen many things to interest him.

"I thought it better to send for you," said Mr. Foyle to Josiah. "I hope you are not put to any inconvenience?"

"It only means a little delay," said Josiah. "I can make up for it."

"You shall not lose by it," said Mr. Foyle, smiling. Then coming to the point he asked, "Where did you buy that mare? She looks a thoroughbred, and if she is by Hurricane, and was called Storm, I knew her; but are you sure she is the mare so named?"

"I bought her from a man at Barnet Fair; she was sold by auction. I took a fancy to her. The auctioneer gave me her pedigree; he said it was correct and I'd got a bargain."

"So you have, if she really is Storm," said Mr. Foyle as he opened a book on his desk.

"She's sixteen," he said, "and has had three foals; two dead at birth, the other one killed by falling in a race; I recollect him. She ought to breed again."

"She might," said Josiah.

"Are you willing to sell her?"

"She suits me very well."

"But she is hardly strong enough for your work," said the Squire.

"It's not such hard work as you'd think," said Josiah.

"Will you sell her?"

"I've not thought about it," said Josiah.

"I do not wish to know what you gave for her, but if you will sell her to me I will give you a hundred guineas for her."

Josiah opened his eyes. A hundred guineas for Weather Glass! That was indeed a handsome profit.

"I don't see how I can refuse that," said Josiah; "but I'll be sorry to part with her—we'll all be sorry to lose her; won't we, Dan?"

"Yes," said Dan in a low voice.

"Stand up," said Mr. Foyle abruptly, and Dan sprang off his seat with a start.

"You are a little fellow," said the Squire; "what is your weight?"

"I don't know exactly," said Dan.

Josiah lifted Dan by the collar of his coat.

"He's not over five stone, I'll bet," he said.

The Squire laughed at Josiah's way of estimating Dan's weight, then said, as he rang a bell, "Go with Dixon, he'll weigh you."

Dan left the room with the man, and Mr. Foyle, turning quickly to Josiah, asked—

"Is the lad bound to you in any way?"

"No; except by a sort of arrangement."

"What way?"

"He's placed in my charge by Eli Hind."

"I see," said Mr. Foyle. "Are you willing to part with him?"

"I'll not stand in his light, if it's for his good."

"But you will be sorry to lose him?"

"That's it; him and the old mare, we'll miss 'em both."

"You will soon find another lad, and it is easy to buy a horse that will suit you."

"I'll find the horse, but it'll be none so easy to replace the lad. My wife's that fond of him, he might be her own son."

"Have you any children?"

"No," said Josiah in a shamefaced way, which caused Mr. Foyle to smile.

"Eli spoke to me about the boy. I think he would do for the racing stable, he's no weight to speak of, and he seems strong. He can ride a little, and he would soon get on."

"That's what he wants."

"What?"

"To go into a racing stable."

"I will send him to Newmarket if you will let him leave, and Eli wishes it; he can be apprenticed to my trainer for five years or so."

"I'll leave it to him," said Josiah. "As I said, I won't stand in his way."

Dan entered with Dixon, who said he weighed four stone ten pounds.

"An uncommonly light weight," said Mr. Foyle. "Do you think he will grow much?"

"He hasn't grown a bit this last twelve months," said Josiah.

"Would you like to go into my racing stables?" asked Mr. Foyle.

Dan's eyes sparkled, and his heart beat fast.

"Oh yes, please, sir; indeed I should." Then he glanced at Josiah, who said—

"Go on; don't mind me."

"But I'll be sorry to leave you," said Dan.

"It's to better yourself, and you oughtn't to miss the chance."

"What'll Nancy say?"

"Blest if I know," said Josiah.

Squire Foyle was amused; on the *Merry Belle* all was peace and harmony, at any rate.

"When should you want him, Squire?"

"I will write to Crisp and ascertain when he can take him."

"And when do you want the mare?"

"At once."

"I must find another horse."

"You will easily do that. I have no doubt you can buy one in Poolbank."

"Not me," said Josiah. "They put the price on too stiff."

"But they know you; that will make a difference" said Mr. Foyle.

"So it will; they'll charge a bit more, that's the difference there'll be. I know 'em," said Josiah.

Squire Foyle laughed as he said—

"You seem to think they are keen in Poolbank."

"So they are, keen as mustard," said Josiah.

"Perhaps I have a horse that will suit you."

Josiah smiled as he said—

"Any horse from here would turn up his nose at the feed I'd give him.

"We do not pamper them."

"I'll hire a horse from Jack Dent until I can pitch on one I want," said Josiah.

"And the mare, when can I have her?"

"If Dent lets me have a horse, I'll send Dan up with her to-morrow."

"And you shall have the money now. I will give you a cheque."

"Thank you kindly, Squire. It's a big sum. I hope you'll be satisfied."

"I think I shall. Do you happen to have her pedigree with you?"

"I have the paper the auctioneer gave me," he said as he handed it to him.

Mr. Foyle read it; then said—

"It seems correct. I do not suppose he would have given it you had it not been so; he had no object in deceiving you."

"Supposing you find out she's not Storm?" said Josiah.

Mr. Foyle laughed as he said—

"I will not go back on my bargain."

He wrote out a cheque and handed it to Josiah.

"Send her up in the morning."

"And what about Dan?" asked Josiah.

"I will let you know when I hear from Crisp, and when I have put the matter to Eli," said Mr. Foyle.

CHAPTER IX

A KEEPSAKE FOR DAN

WHEN Dan Hind left the *Merry Belle* Nancy cried over him, hugging him to her, and making a "terrible bother," so Josiah said. Dan, too, was much troubled, and broke down badly at the last.

"It licks me what you're howling about," said Josiah, as he looked at his tearful face. "You've got what you wanted. I can't see where the tears come in; because Nance is a bit soft-hearted, it's no reason you should be."

"I'd sooner have a soft heart than a hard one," said Nancy, looking daggers at him through her tears.

Josiah felt the parting with Dan keenly, but he was not going to show it—not if he knew it.

"It don't do to be too soft-hearted in this world," he growled; "there's too many rogues prowling about for that."

"I believe you're glad the boy's going," said Nancy.

"Maybe I am, and maybe I'm not; it's just how you take it," said Josiah.

Dan smiled as he looked at him. He saw Josiah was "putting it on," and that in his own way he was as sorry to lose him as Nancy.

"I'll go a bit o' the way with you," said Josiah, "if so be as you wish it."

Dan was going to Eli's cottage for a week or two, until such time as he was to be sent to Newmarket.

Weather Glass had been installed in a comfortable box at Eagle Hurst, where she was quite at home, and Josiah had secured another horse to take her place.

Dan said he would like Josiah's company.

"You'll come and see me before I leave Eli's?" he asked turning to Nancy.

"Yes, Danny, I'll come—that is if Josiah will trust me to leave the boat. He seems to think I'm not safe on land."

"You're wrong, my girl," said Josiah. "You're safe enough anywhere, and I can trust you always."

"But you're a bit jealous at times," said Nancy, looking at Dan.

"Of course I am. What's a man worth if he can't be jealous of the best thing he ever had in his life?" said Josiah.

"Then I am some good?" said Nancy.

"You're all good—every little bit of you. I'd like to meet the man as said contrary."

"What would you do, Josh?"

"Do! I'd maul his face for him," said Josiah, at which dire threat she laughed.

Josiah walked to Poolbank with Dan, and stopped in front of the general store.

"What would you like, Dan?" he asked. "I want to give you a keep-sake; spend a pound or so out of that hundred guineas I got for the mare."

"I don't want anything," said Dan. "You have always treated me well."

"But I mean to give you something," said Josiah, looking at the numerous goods in the windows. One part of the store was allotted to saddlery, and several whips—riding and driving—were displayed.

"How'd you like a riding-whip?" asked Josiah. "It would come in useful."

"A whip!" exclaimed Dan. "Oh, yes, I'd like a whip more than anything."

"Come along," said Josiah; and they entered the shop.

Josiah was very particular. He pulled the stock about, turning over whip after whip and discarding them.

"I want something better."

The storekeeper looked at him and smiled.

"You'll find these all right, I'm sure. I have one or two mounted riding-whips, but they come expensive."

"Oh, do they?" said Josiah. "Then probably they'll suit me better than cheap stuff. Let me see them."

The whips were produced from a glass case, and Dan's eyes opened wide as he saw them.

There was one delicate whip with a white ivory handle and a gold knob and plate on it. Josiah took it up.

"How much is this?" he said.

"That's three pounds ten," said the storekeeper indifferently.

"I'll have it," said Josiah. And both Dan and the man gasped and stared at him.

"And I want something written on this plate."

"You mean engraved?"

"If that's what you call it," said Josiah.

"What do you wish put on the plate?"

"From Josiah and Nancy to Dan on leaving the *Merry Belle*."

"It will just about go on," said the man.

"It's got to go on," was Josiah's comment. "When can he have it?"

"Who?"

"This little chap."

"Oh, it's for him."

"You didn't suppose I wanted a toothpick like that!" said Josiah.

"It will be ready in a week; I'll send it to London to be done."

"Not clever enough to do it yourself?" said Josiah.

"Engraving is a separate art," said the man.

"What, scratching a few letters!" exclaimed Josiah.

"There will be no scratching about this."

"How much extra?" asked Josiah.

"I'll let you know."

"All right. Dan will call for the whip, and I'll pay you next time I'm at Poolbank Lock. I'm Josiah Fudge, owner of the *Merry Belle*."

"I know you, Mr. Fudge; it's all right," said the man.

When they were in the street again Dan said—

"You ought not to have spent so much money on me."

"It'll bring you luck, that whip, I know it will; something told me the moment I set eyes on it."

"I'm glad you put Nancy's name on."

"You don't suppose I'd leave her out; not me, my lad, I'm too fond of her for that."

"She'll be pleased."

"Of course she will; she's mighty fond of you, Dan."

They parted, and as Josiah smothered the lad's small hand in his big fist, he said—

"Always go straight, Danny, and you'll have nothing to fear; and don't forget us, or the old *Merry Belle*."

Dan was too overcome to speak, but he looked for a long time down the road after Josiah had turned and waved farewell.

Eli still had some of the good things Mr. Foyle had sent in the Christmas hamper, and they had been specially reserved to celebrate Dan's promotion in life.

The winter so far had been mild, and although it was the end of January there was no sign of frost.

"I'll not see much of you when you get to Newmarket," said Eli, as they sat close up to the fire, which glowed in a deep red mass on the old-fashioned open hearth.

The oak chimney-piece would have been prized in many a large house, and the various brass and copper utensils on the shelf reflected the flickering fire-light. The room was small and cosy; on one side was a spacious sofa on which Eli took many a long nap. Sundry prints of rural scenes hung on the walls, and in the centre, above the sofa, was an engraving of Squire Foyle as M.F.H.

Dan was debating as to whether he should tell Eli about the whip; perhaps it would be as well to do so.

"Josiah bought me a keepsake in the village," he said.

"Did he, now? It's not often he opens his purse, except to put something in it," said Eli.

"He can be liberal at times," said Dan.

"Those times be few and far between. What's he given you?"

"A gold-mounted riding-whip; it is a beauty."

"Gold!" sniffed Eli. "Gold, ye say. Rubbish, says I."

"It's true! It cost a lot of money."

"Did it, now? Two shillin', maybe."

Dan laughed.

"A lot—many times more than that."

"Five, maybe."

"More, ever so much more," said the delighted Dan.

"Was he sober?" asked Eli solemnly.

"Who?"

"Josiah."

"Yes, of course he was."

"And it cost more'n five shillin'?"

"Yes; heaps more."

"Tell me how much," said Eli.

"Three pounds ten shillings," said Dan.

"For a ridin'-whip!" gasped Eli both hands on the arms of his chair, and staring at Dan.

"Yes, gold-mounted."

"He must 'a been drunk, I'm sure on it," said Eli solemnly. "You'll not be goin' to take advantage of a man in that state, Danny?"

Dan laughed heartily as he said—

"Josiah never gets drunk. He bought the whip, and it's a present from him and Nancy."

"Ah," said Eli, with a deep-drawn sigh of satisfaction. "I thought there was summat at the bottom of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it's plain as plain—as plain as Josiah's face."

"What is?" said Dan, puzzled.

"Nancy put him up to it. She'll pay for it. Josiah 'll never part with all that money, 'tain't likely."

"Nancy knows nothing about it," said Dan.

"He'd not tell you, not him; but mark my word for it, Nancy 'll pay."

Dan tried to convince Eli he wronged Josiah, but all in vain, so at last he said—

"You'd better ask Nancy, and hear what she says."

"I'll not believe her if she says Josiah paid for it," said Eli.

Dan allowed the matter to drop, and in the course of a week went to the store for his whip.

It was ready, and as the man handed it to him he said—

"You're a lucky youngster to have a whip like that; mind and take care of it. Do you ride?"

"A bit. I hope to ride well soon."

"Going into a stable?"

"Yes; I'm going to Newmarket, to Mr. Crisp. He trains for Squire Foyle."

"Bless me, you are going to Dinmore House, are you?"

"That's the place."

"Well, you're a little chap, and I'll be bound you get on. I wish you luck, and I'm glad you've got that whip; it's a real good one."

"Josiah said something told him it would bring me luck as soon as he saw it."

"Don't drop it and lose your luck."

"No fear of that," said Dan, smiling, as he went away with it.

Eli examined it carefully, and Dan read the inscription to him.

"It's a fine whip, and no mistake," said Eli, "Some one may steal it from you at Newmarket. You'd better leave it here with me ; I'll take care of it for you."

"I shall want it," said Dan.

"They'll not let you use a whip until you can ride."

"But I'm proud of it, and I want to show it to the other lads," said Dan:

"Three pounds ten shillings," said Eli, as he handled it carefully. "Josiah's free with his wife's money."

"I tell you he paid for it himself ; Nancy knew nothing about it," said Dan sharply.

"Well, well, we won't quarrel about it," said Eli ; "but if Josiah bought and paid for it out of his own pocket, I'm a Dutchman."

CHAPTER X

TOWN LIFE

IN a comfortable flat, in a quiet street in Westminster, Edwin Swinton, Mr. Foyle's stepson, was seated at the table playing with a late breakfast. His appetite was not good. Late hours are not conducive to healthy hunger in the morning. His face was pale, and there were rings around his eyes. His bath failed to banish the signs of dissipation, although it refreshed him. Poising a minute fragment of kidney on his fork, he held it for a minute, then put it on the plate again, and pushed it away.

"No appetite," he said. "I suppose it is not to be expected. I wonder what time it was when I went to bed ; must have been three or four."

He looked at the timepiece ; it was nearing noon.

Several papers and letters lay on the table. He opened a sporting journal and looked at the list of odds on the Lincoln Handicap, Grand National, and Derby.

"Faked," he muttered ; "there's no market yet. I wonder who supplies these quotations. Fancy any sane man taking ten to one about old Carraway for the Lincoln mile ! There are some fools in the world, and no mistake." He did not consider himself one of the batch ; some people might.

"It's not often Cecil Havers goes on a 'jag,' but he was fairly carried off his legs last night, or this morning, or some time betwixt and between. Wonder how he feels : he'll go to sleep in the bank probably and get the sack—I hope not. I have no wish to get into the parson's black books—or Olive's. Nice girl, Olive ; nicest girl I ever met. I wonder why she avoids me ?"

This question was not difficult to answer. Olive was healthy, clean-minded ; Edwin Swinton was neither, their natures were as far apart as the poles.

"Cob's at the door, sir."

"All right, Parker ; I'll be out in a few minutes."

"This note was left for you," said Ash Parker, handing him a small envelope.

Edwin took it, perceived the scent and laughed.

"Who brought it?"

"A messenger boy."

"You may go."

He opened the envelope and read the note. It was brief.

"Don't forget I will be in the park at twelve-thirty—yours, Lilian."

"And I'll be there too," he said. "Nice little girl, Lilian: good fun, likes a joke. She's getting on in the world. She made a hit in 'The House Party'; the Frolic was packed last night. Havers enjoyed the supper, so did the girls."

He went out, mounted his cob and rode to Hyde Park. After a canter up and down the Row he met Lilian Freelight on a smart hack.

"Here you are," she said. "You look seedy; what time did you turn in?"

"I couldn't tell you to an hour."

"Naughty boy; and Mr. Havers?"

"Oh, he's on duty at the bank, I suppose; I hope he likes it."

"You would be all the better for something to do," she said.

"Ask old Foot to find me a job."

She laughed as she replied—

"Do you know what he would say?"

"No."

"That he didn't want the show demoralised."

"Strong on morals, isn't he?"

"Well, yes, as things go I think he is; he looks after us all pretty well."

"He has his work cut out," said Edwin.

"Don't be spiteful."

"I'm not."

"Do you really believe I want looking after?"

"No; on the contrary, *we* require looking after. You are positively too dangerously fascinating."

"We!" she exclaimed.

"I mean young men like myself, who easily succumb to feminine charms."

"You are talking nonsense. How do you like my hack?"

"Very much; where did you pick him up?"

"I didn't pick him up; he's a present."

"Oh!" said Edwin significantly.

"From my brother," she said with a laugh.

"Generous youth."

"He is. I'm awfully fond of Harry; he's a very good brother to me."

Harry Freelight was a well-known jockey on whom Mr. Foyle had first call.

"By the way, do you know Mr. Foyle?" asked Edwin.

"You mean Harry's employer?"

"Yes."

"I have seen him; he's a handsome man. Your stepfather, is he not?"

"Yes; who told you?"

"Harry."

"Then you have informed your brother you know me?"

"Of course, I tell him everything," said Lilian.

"Good little girl," said Edwin.

"He has looked after me ever since I was a child; my mother is an invalid. He sent me to school. We were not at all well off when my father died, but since Harry became a jockey it has been different," said Lilian.

They were riding slowly down the Row; there were not many spectators leaning over the rails as the morning was cold, but several of them recognised the charming actress from the Frolic and envied her companion. Edwin Swinton had known Lilian Freelight only a few weeks, and up to now he failed to understand her. His opinion of light opera artistes was not exalted; he had known several, and found them very different from Lilian Freelight. She puzzled him; he liked her, thought she preferred his society to that of other admirers, and they were many. Somehow she checked his unruly tongue—it seldom ran riot in her presence. He was beginning to think she exercised an influence for good over him, and rather liked the idea. Of course she was not like Olive Havers—their lives were very different. Olive was a lady; was it doing Lilian an injustice not to place her in the same category? He enjoyed his ride, and when she left him an hour later he missed her. At first he enjoyed seeing her on the stage, clad in light, airy garments; lately however, he preferred her in ordinary attire, especially in her riding-habit. She sat her horse well; her brother had taught her to ride, and he had few equals in his profession. As for Lilian Freelight she had not given Edwin Swinton much of her thoughts, until her brother had quietly cautioned her to be careful with him. He told her that Edwin Swinton was rich, that he was a man about town whose reputation was none of the best, and that Squire Foyle never spoke of him.

"Do you wish me to give up seeing him?" she asked.

"No, not exactly that, but be careful; label him dangerous, Sis, that's what I mean," said Harry.

She had so labelled him, and thought she did him an injustice; so far she had found nothing dangerous about him.

Hamil Foot, the manager of the Frolic, when he heard she knew Edwin Swinton, said—

"You know Mr. Swinton, I hear."

"Yes," said Lilian.

Hamil Foot took a particular interest in Lilian Freelight; he owned horses, and her brother sometimes rode them. Harry had spoken to him about her.

"He's rather a fast young man," he said.

"Is he?"

"It's no business of mine," went on Foot, "but I like you, Miss Freelight, and you won't mind an old hand like me giving you a word of caution and advice."

"Oh, dear, no," said Lilian.

"You remember ——," he mentioned a well-known actress's name, who for some time shone as a bright particular star at the Frolic; "well, you

may also have heard what happened; that was put down to Swinton's credit, and he never took the trouble to deny it."

Lilian remembered this, but as she knew more of Edwin Swinton she could not believe it true. She thought a good deal about him, but as yet her feelings were not particularly engaged in his favour.

At six o'clock Cecil Havers came to Swinton's rooms, and they went out to dine together. He was in the General Counties Bank, where his salary was some two hundred a year. It is a difficult matter for a young man with two hundred a year to keep pace with a friend who draws as much in a month as he earns in a twelvemonth. Cecil Havers' reputation at Poolbank was not good; he had caused his father much worry and anxiety. Olve had only a faint idea of his backslidings. When he obtained his position in the branch of the General Bank at Poolbank he seemed to turn over a new leaf, but it was not without misgiving his father saw him transferred to London. He knew his son and Edwin Swinton were friends, and the Squire had warned him against the connection. In London they would probably meet, and Mr. Havers knew the vast temptations of the huge city, and how small a sum two hundred a year was in such a mighty whirl of pleasure. He cautioned Cecil against Edwin Swinton, telling him a rich young man was no fit companion for one who had to earn his living and be content with a modest income.

At the end of twelve months the manager of the bank gave Cecil a favourable report, and Mr. Havers was more contented. At first Cecil declined Edwin Swinton's invitations to his flat, but constant pressure altered his determination. He explained to Swinton his income was limited, and he could not go the pace with him.

"I have plenty," said Edwin. "If you want any spare cash ask me, and I'll give it you with pleasure."

Cecil said he could not do that; he must try and make both ends meet somehow.

"But if you can't," said Edwin, "don't forget me. I assure you I shall not miss a few pounds."

"How did you feel this morning?" asked Edwin, as they sat at a small table in the restaurant of a well-known hotel.

"Seedy; but I don't think any one noticed it. Luckily there was not much to do."

"Supposing they had noticed it?" he asked.

"Something might have been said. The old man is a trifle strict."

"I couldn't stick to bank work," said Edwin.

Cecil laughed half-heartedly as he said—

"I have to stick to it, and I suppose I'm not getting a bad salary as things go."

"How much is it?"

"Two hundred a year."

Edwin smiled.

"I have never tried to live on that. I wonder how I'd like it."

"Not at all," laughed Cecil.

"No, I suppose not. I'm glad my mother had the sense to leave her money to me instead of old Foyle," said Edwin.

"He has plenty of his own. Have you been to Eagle Hurst lately?"

"No: there's not much inducement to go there—except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"To see Olive," said Edwin, watching his friend's face.

Cecil laughed as he said—

"I wonder what Olive would have said if she had seen us with the girls last night at supper?"

"Been shocked, of course," said Edwin. "But there's no reason why she should hear about it. Besides, when a fellow marries a girl like Olive he gives up such things, and settles down for life."

The idea of Edwin marrying his sister was not displeasing to Cecil. Swinton was well off, and would be an accommodating brother-in-law; and after all he was a real good fellow, if he was a trifle wild. As he said, if he married Olive he would settle down for good.

"I think I'd go down to Poolbank more frequently," said Cecil smiling at him.

CHAPTER XI

A CHANGE OF AIR

EDWIN SWINTON took Cecil's advice and went to Eagle Hurst.

"What brings him here?" said Mr. Foyle, who was riding across the path and saw him walking up the drive.

Edwin entered the house and went to his rooms. He found everything as he had left it a month before.

In answer to his inquiry, he was informed Mr. Foyle was out. He shrugged his shoulders, saying, "It did not matter; it was of no consequence." The servants were aware relations were strained between them, and the majority sided with Mr. Foyle, who was a very good master.

Edwin went out a short time after his arrival, and walked towards the village. As he passed Eli's cottage he saw the old man at the gate, and stopped to speak to him.

"Any fresh news, Eli? Not much in this sleepy hole, I expect," he said.

"It's none so sleepy as it looks. There's some wide-awake folks about here," said Eli.

"And as you are one, you can tell me the news, if there is any. I have not been here for a month."

"Danny's got a rise in the world," said Eli.

"That's your grandson, is he not?" said Edwin.

"Yes."

"Where's he risen to?"

"Newmarket," said Eli.

Edwin looked surprised.

"He was on the canal-boat, was he not? What's he gone to Newmarket for?"

"He left the *Merry Belle*. He's gone into the Squire's stable. He's going to be a jockey," said Eli.

"That's a change, anyhow."

"He'll make a good jockey," said Eli.

"Can he ride?"

"Yes."

"Where did he learn?"

"I don't know. But he can ride, and Squire Foyle knows it."

"Seen much of the Squire lately?" he asked.

"He mostly has a word with me as he passes."

"You see more of him than I do," said Edwin.

"Maybe that's your own fault."

"You're wrong. It's not my fault; he avoids me," said Edwin crossly.

"London's a good way from Poolbank," commented Eli. "If you spend your time there, you don't take a deal of avoiding."

Edwin was about to turn away when he saw Olive Havers in the distance. She had a basket on her arm. Probably she was coming to the cottage. He stepped inside the gate and looked about the garden.

"You have a nice place here, Eli," he said.

"Thanks to the Squire."

"Don't you feel lonely at times?"

"No; I find plenty to do. It's folks with nowt to do feels time hang heavily," said Eli.

"That's one for me, I suppose?" said Edwin, laughing, and listening for Olive's footsteps.

"I've heard as you're none so fond o' work," said Eli. "Why, here's Miss Olive!" he exclaimed, as he saw her at the gate.

When she saw Edwin she seemed not altogether pleasantly surprised, but she held out her hand, greeting him in a friendly way, asking when he came to Eagle Hurst.

"This morning," he said, "I was asking Eli if there was any fresh news."

"And has he enlightened you?"

"Yes, he gives me the important information that his grandson has gone to Crisp's stables at Newmarket."

She did not like his tone and said—

"It is very kind of Mr. Foyle to take an interest in him."

"So it is, Miss Olive," said Eli; "but the Squire's always doing some one a good turn."

"I am quite sure of that," said Olive warmly. "I have brought you a few things, Eli. Shall I put them on the table?"

"Allow me," said Edwin, offering to take the basket; but she declined, and going inside put it on Eli's table. The old man followed her, giving her many thanks.

"And you must let me know all about Dan when you hear from him," she said as she bid him good morning.

"To be sure I will, Miss Olive," he answered.

"May I accompany you?" asked Edwin.

She could not very well refuse, so answered—

"If you wish; I am returning to the vicarage; it will be out of your way."

"I would walk a good many miles out of my way to meet you, Olive," he said.

He called her by her Christian name because he had known her a long time and he was a friend of her brother's; but she did not like it

"I am generally to be found at home," she said smiling, "so there is no necessity to search for me. Have you seen Cecil lately?"

He thought of the supper with the Frolic girls, and smiled as he replied—

"We dined together last night; he is very well."

"You told him you were coming to Poolbank?"

"No; I had not thought of doing so until this morning."

"A sudden resolve, was it?" she asked.

"Yes; I had not been for some time."

"You prefer town life to country?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"The society here. Now, if I saw you every day, it would be much easier to be reconciled to a country life."

Olive laughed as she said—

"I am afraid I must seem very dull when compared with the ladies you meet in London."

He looked at her suspiciously; then thought—

"She can't know anything about Lillian or the other girls?"

"I assure you the ladies of my acquaintance are not numerous," he said, "and I prefer your society infinitely more to that of any other lady."

They were at the vicarage gate.

"Will you come in and see my father?" she asked.

Edwin had no desire to see the Vicar, but thought it better to accept her invitation.

"He will be glad to hear about Cecil," she said.

Mr. Havers welcomed him courteously. Although he did not like him, his manner was cordial. In answer to his inquiry, Edwin said he had seen a good deal of Cecil lately; he thought he was contented and doing well at the bank.

"He must attend to his duties," said Mr. Havers; "he has a good chance of being promoted—the manager gave me that satisfaction."

"Is he going to leave London? He has not said anything about it to me."

"Not at present; but in the course of another year he may have a branch to manage."

"Poolbank?" asked Edwin.

"I do not know," said Mr. Havers, smiling. "Of course, we should like him to come here. Olive, Mr. Swinton would like a glass of wine."

"No, thanks," said Edwin. "I seldom take anything before luncheon."

"As you please; it is a good plan."

No mention was made of the Squire, and Mr. Havers gave a sigh of relief when he left.

"I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again several times before I leave," said Edwin to Olive.

"How long are you going to stay at Eagle Hurst?" she asked.

"It all depends," he answered.

"Upon what?"

"You."

"What have I to do with it?"

"More than you think," he replied.

"Where did you meet Mr. Swinton?" asked the Vicar when Olive re-entered the room.

"At Eli's cottage; he was there when I arrived with my basket. I was surprised to see him."

"He looks pale; London life does not suit him. I hope Cecil will not see too much of him."

"They have been friends for a long time," said Olive.

"I hope I do not do him an injustice, but I cannot say I like him, Olive."

"If he behaved in a more friendly way to Mr. Foyle I should think more of him," she answered.

"Yes, it is a pity they are not more united," said Mr. Havers.

"Here is the Squire," he added, as Mr. Foyle rode into the yard at the side of the house and dismounted.

It was no unusual thing for Mr. Foyle to call; he liked a chat with the Vicar. His manner was genial and hearty, and he looked earnestly at Olive as he held her hand.

"The picture of health, as usual," he said, smiling.

"I always feel well," said Olive, laughing; "I am not cut out for an interesting invalid."

"I don't see why an invalid should be interesting," said Mr. Foyle. "I prefer a healthy girl; what do you say, Vicar?"

"One can be interested in invalids without the invalid being interesting," he said.

"Quite so," said Mr. Foyle. "I have a visitor at Eagle Hurst."

"We have seen him," said Olive, smiling.

"Oh, he's been here, has he?" said Mr. Foyle. "I mean my stepson."

"He met Olive at Eli's cottage and walked home with her," said the Vicar.

"He never sends word when we may expect him," said the Squire.

"How does he look?"

"You have not seen him?" said Olive.

"Only in the distance."

"Father thinks London life does not suit him," she said.

"The sort of life he leads is not good for anyone."

Olive was called out of the room, and Mr. Foyle said to the Vicar—

"I hope Olive does not see much of Edwin."

The Vicar smiled as he replied, "She does not like him sufficiently well, I think. She rather avoids him, at least, so it seems to me."

"Good," said Mr. Foyle. "Olive deserves a better fate than to fall in love with Edwin Swinton."

"There's no danger of that," said the Vicar. "She is heart-whole at present; she is young."

"Yes, she is young," said the Squire moodily; "but she is a woman, and women's hearts are quickly touched. She has grown into an uncommonly attractive girl, my friend."

"You really think so?"

"I do; how old is she?"

"Twenty-one next May," said the Vicar.

"How time flies," said the Squire. "Twenty-one? It seems no longer than a few years since she was in short frocks. I called in to tell you I am going to Newmarket next week; will you call at Eagle Hurst occasionally and have a quiet look around as usual?"

"If you wish it; but I am afraid the servants will think me an intruder."

"I have assured you before they do nothing of the kind. I know it; they would resent some folks calling, but not you; that's different," said Mr. Foyle.

"I am glad to hear it. Of course, you know I am only too glad to be of any assistance to you."

"Keep your eye on Edwin if he stays here during my absence," said Mr. Foyle.

The Vicar laughed as he said, "He will resent that strongly."

The Squire made an impatient gesture with his hand. "He's not a fit companion for Olive, that's what I mean," he said.

That evening Edwin dined with the Squire, and was more deferential to him than usual.

"Are you staying long?" asked Mr. Foyle after dinner.

"A week or two, perhaps. I am getting tired of London."

"I'm glad to hear it. Next week I go to Newmarket; but of course you know your rooms are always at your disposal."

Edwin thanked him and said, "Old Eli told me his grandson had gone to Crisp's."

"Yes; he's a likely lad, and very small; he ought to be useful."

"Have you anything good for the Spring Handicaps?"

"No. Crisp says it will be better to wait a month or six weeks."

"He's generally late," said Edwin.

"I do not wish for a better trainer," said Mr. Foyle sharply. "By the way, if you see the Vicar about here during my absence, he is looking round at my request."

Edwin laughed as he said—

"Then he is not above attending to worldly matters?"

"No, he's a good business man and a good parson; it is a somewhat rare combination," replied Mr. Foyle.

CHAPTER XII

DAN AT NEWMARKET

BERT CRISP was surprised when he saw Dan. He patted him on the head as he said laughingly—

"You are a little fellow. How much do you weigh?"

"Four stone ten pounds."

"And not likely to put on much flesh. Mr. Foyle says you can ride."

"I've not had much practice, but I think I can stick on," said Dan.

Some of the lads at Dinmore House were inclined to make fun of him. He took it all in good part; he was accustomed to chaffing with the canal-lads, and they were a rougher lot than the stable-boys. He had to run a fire of questions, most of which he answered readily. When it was discovered he had been on a canal-boat there was some amusement; they did not consider it a good school for a training-stable. They called him "Barge," and the nickname stuck to him. Dan did not mind it, and determined to show them he could ride when he had the opportunity.

Bert Crisp liked the look of the lad; he seemed strong and healthy. When he learned from Mr. Foyle where Dan had been employed he had some doubts about him. Canal-lads were, so he understood, a rough uncouth lot, and he had no desire for samples of this kind to enter the stable.

Dan was the smallest boy in the stable, and Mrs. Crisp consequently took an interest in him. His chubby face and merry eyes appealed to her. She was fond of youngsters, and it was a great grief to her and her husband when their only son was killed by a kick from a horse on Newmarket Heath. She had a long talk with Dan, and quickly found out all about Eli, Josiah Fudge, and Nancy. When she saw his whip she at once took charge of it; she knew some of the lads would not resist the temptation to use it.

"What do you think of the little fellow Mr. Foyle sent?" asked Crisp.

"I like the lad," she answered. "He's a good little chap, and he'll get on. I mean to look after him."

"Then he's sure to do well if he is in your good books," said Bert, smiling. "I had a note from Freelight this morning, he'll be here to-day; work has commenced in earnest."

"Harry will take to Dan," she said.

"Glad you think so; he's rather particular."

Harry Freelight was regarded with a certain amount of awe by the Dinmore boys. His reputation as a jockey stood high, and they were proud of his connection with the stable; his successes reflected credit on the establishment.

Soon after the jockey's arrival he saw Dan and eyed him curiously.

"Where did you pick up the little fellow?" he asked the trainer.

"I did not pick him up; Mr. Foyle sent him here."

"He'll be useful; he can't be much weight."

"Under five stone."

"Has he had a mount yet?"

"No."

"Let him ride, in a gallop with me; I'll give him a wrinkle," said Harry.

"Very well, I'll pick a quiet mount for him," said the trainer.

When Dan heard he was to ride with Harry Freelight he became excited; he hoped the crack jockey would not consider him beneath his notice. He wondered what sort of a mount he would have; these race-horses looked full of life and fire, and he had no wish to be thrown and cause amusement to his companions.

Bert Crisp, next morning, put Dan on Stormlight, a five-year-old, blessed with an amiable temper, a good horse for a novice to ride. Stormlight was bred by Mr. Foyle, and had been in the Dinmore stable since he was a yearling. He had won many races but nothing first-class, nevertheless Crisp had a high opinion of him as a schoolmaster for young horses. He was a big, raking chestnut standing nearly seventeen hands, with somewhat clumsy action; "Long Tom" the lads called him, and regarded him as a sort of pensioner whose career was over.

Bert Crisp, however, was far from regarding Stormlight's racing days as finished; he knew different, and that there were several races to be won with him yet, if he was well placed.

"Now, youngster," said Crisp to Dan, "sit still on him and don't be nervous, and you'll find him an easy mount."

He showed Dan how to hold the reins and to sit when the horse galloped.

There were hundreds of horses on the Heath, and Dan opened his eyes wide with astonishment when he saw them galloping in all directions. The wind was sharp and piercing, but he was used to the cold, and although his fingers were numbed, he warmed them at his mouth and restored their circulation.

Harry Freelight rode the Marquis, a good-looking bay three-year-old, one of the cracks of the stable.

"Your first ride, Dan, is it not?" he said.

"Yes, at Newmarket."

"But you have been on horses before?"

"Yes, several times."

"Come with me to the mile post, and I'll show you what to do," said Harry.

The Marquis broke into a canter and Stormlight followed. Dan thought the motion of the horse beautiful, he felt quite comfortable, what a difference there was riding on the Heath to careering about in the fields at Poolbank. He remembered his gallop on Weather Glass after the hounds, and smiled.

At the starting-post Harry turned the Marquis round and beckoned to Dan to come alongside.

"Be ready," he said, "and when I say 'go,' jump him off. Sit close to your saddle and hold the reins in a firm grasp, but don't pull at his mouth. Never hang on to the reins, they are only to be used to encourage your

mount and guide him. Don't be nervous ; a horse knows at once if you are frightened, and he'll play up accordingly. Keep your knees well in and don't stick your elbows out. When I call to you to come on, urge him forward ; you have not much chance of passing the Marquis, but keep as near as you can. Watch me, and when I ease him you do the same."

Harry gave the word. The Marquis dashed away, and Stormlight jumped forward with a bound, throwing Dan up in the air ; he came down in the saddle with a thud. After the first shock, he followed Harry's instructions and sat tight. Stormlight had a good mouth and was no trouble to steer : he followed in the track of the Marquis, apparently with no desire to overtake him.

Dan thoroughly enjoyed the novelty. The wind whistled round him, and he bent his head to meet it. Harry Freelight looked round and beckoned him to come on, which Dan tried to do, but Stormlight still went on at the old pace. Dan shouted at him, shook the reins, dug his heels into him, and all to no purpose. The Marquis drew farther away, and Dan was left behind. When Harry pulled his mount up, he had turned the horse round before Dan finished.

"You'll have to carry a whip next time," he said, smiling. "Long Tom is a bit of a slug."

"I could not make him go faster," said Dan, ruefully.

"You have done very well ; some of the lads cannot get him along at all." This was encouraging, and Dan felt pleased.

When they rode up to the trainer, he said—

"Slip off, and I'll put you on another one ; you ride fairly well for a new hand."

Dan looked from his perch to the ground ; it seemed a long way.

Crisp winked at Harry, and they both watched Dan, who, without further hesitation, threw his leg over, hung on for a moment, then dropped, and landed in a sitting position on the ground, but held on to the reins.

The trainer and the jockey laughed, and the former said—

"Rather a long drop for you, Dan ; but you'll soon fall on your feet with a little practice. Put him up on Daisy," he said to the head lad.

Daisy was a grey four-year-old, and sometimes played pranks on the Heath. She seemed in a good humour this morning ; but the lads were on the look out for fun.

Dan's ride on Stormlight had given him confidence ; this was what Crisp intended, and he said—

"Watch her ; she's rather more life in her than Long Tom."

Dan soon found this out. Daisy cut capers at once. She hustled round, danced playfully, reared, then plunged, and finally bounded off at a fast pace with Dan clinging on, considerably shaken and upset, but determined not to be beaten. He got back into the saddle, and took a firm grip on the reins.

Crisp watched the proceedings with practised eyes.

"I think he'll do," he said to Harry.

"Not much doubt about it ; Daisy has given some of the lads a fall. He

sticks on, and he's plenty of pluck. Sorry to say I'm putting on weight; the little 'un will come in useful. How long have you got him for?"

"Five years."

"That's right; he'll be a good jockey before his time's up."

"If he does half as well as you, I'll be satisfied," said the trainer.

"We have stuck well together," said the jockey,

"I'm glad of it; I never like to sever old friendships."

"It won't be my fault if we part company," said Harry, laughing. "Here he comes; by Jove, he's taking it out of Daisy! he's having his revenge."

"So he is, the young rascal," said Crisp, as he saw Daisy coming on at a great rate with Dan urging her along. He held up his hand for him to stop, but Dan's spirits were up, he was intent on his work, and failed to see the signal.

"Confound the young imp," said Crisp, "he'll be in the High Street if he does not pull up."

"He did not see your signal," said Harry.

As Daisy reached the top of the hill Dan suddenly realised it was time to stop, and endeavoured to do so. He found it more difficult than he expected, but eventually succeeded in turning the mare round. He looked about for the trainer and saw him in the distance on his cob, coming towards him. Dan wondered if there was anything wrong.

"Didn't you see me put up my hand for you to stop?" asked the trainer sharply.

"No," said Dan.

"Then you must keep your eyes open in future; you've almost galloped the mare off her legs. She's trembling all over."

"I'm sorry," said Dan, "I lost my head a bit; I'm not used to it yet, and I thought what it must be like to ride in a race if the horses went as fast as this at exercise."

His face was flushed, and his eyes shone with excitement. As Crisp looked at him he thought, "He's got it in him; he'll be a good jockey, I feel sure of it; but I must not let him see what I think, it will not be good for him."

"They don't go much faster than you went on Daisy," he said. "Mind the next time you ride her to be more careful. I can't have any of my horses knocked about; it takes it out of them, and they want it all in them for a race; they don't want to leave it on the track."

"I'll be more careful," said Dan.

"That's right, my lad. Do as I tell you, and we shall get on," said the trainer.

Dan's first morning on Newmarket Heath was, on the whole, a success, and when Crisp wrote to Mr. Foyle he stated that Dan Hind was, he thought, a promising lad. He also told him, in a joking way, about Dan's ride on Daisy, at which, knowing the mare, Mr. Foyle smiled.

CHAPTER XIII

CAUSE AND EFFECT

DURING Mr. Foyle's absence at Newmarket Edwin Swinton remained at Eagle Hurst. Olive Havers attracted him, and although she avoided him he was convinced she liked him. As a rule he got on well with ladies, and he saw no reason why he should not do so with Olive. For four or five days, after his meeting her at Eli's cottage, he saw nothing of her, but was constantly on the watch. Her father came to Eagle Hurst, and Edwin welcomed him cordially, trying to create a favourable impression, and to a certain extent succeeding. Mr. Havers, however, did not forget Mr. Foyle's caution, and was glad Olive showed no desire to meet him again.

In a small village like Poolbank it was almost impossible for her not to meet Edwin Swinton. The next time he met her she was returning across the park from a neighbouring village. Edwin, always on the look out, saw her and hurried to her. Although he expressed surprise, she knew from his manner he had purposely placed himself in her way. He was a good-looking young fellow, and had she not heard certain rumours about him he might possibly have had a chance of success.

He was a good talker, and succeeded in interesting her. She was glad his conversation was not personal; he talked freely about London, and the various pleasures he indulged in. Olive seldom went to town; occasionally she visited her aunt, her father's sister, who resided in West Kensington, and whose husband was a successful merchant in the City. During these visits she saw very little of the life Edwin Swinton talked about. Mrs. Sharp, her aunt, naturally moved in very different circles.

When he left Newmarket, Mr. Foyle went to Paris. He wrote a short note to Edwin in which he said he might be away from Eagle Hurst for a month. This suited Edwin's plans admirably, and he determined to make good use of his time. He wrote to Cecil Havers, hinting that a word in his favour to Olive would smooth the way for him, stating the more he saw of her the more was he convinced she was the only woman he desired to marry. Casually he mentioned his fortune, with a subtle suggestion that Cecil would not be a loser by helping him to attain his end.

This letter caused Cecil to think before he wrote to his sister. He was very fond of Olive; she generally helped him when he got into any scrape, and soothed his father when he became irritable in consequence. He knew a good deal about Edwin Swinton. As a friend about town he acknowledged he was a boon companion, generous, and considerate; but when it came to a question of marrying Olive it required consideration. He recognised that such a match might turn out to his advantage, and the temptation to assist Edwin was great. He had pondered over this a good deal since Edwin had gone to Eagle Hurst, and the result was the prospect had not such a rosy appearance as he had at first imagined. One thing weighed heavily in Edwin's favour; Cecil Havers was in debt, despite his endeavours to keep

his expenditure within his income. The society of actresses, with suppers, Sunday drives, and so on, is not conducive to economy, as Cecil found out. When Edwin left London the field was clear, and Cecil had made strong running with Lilian Freelight and some of her friends. It was not the fault of Lilian and her companions that he spent more money than he could afford. They were accustomed to the society of men who had money to spend, and naturally thought nothing about Cecil Havers' financial position. It is ridiculous to entirely blame actresses for taking advantage of pleasures inherent to their somewhat butterfly existence. Many of them flit through life with an absence of responsibility for their actions that lends an additional fascination to them ; there are exceptions, but these are seldom to be found on the boards of such theatres as the Frolic. Cecil quickly found that Lilian and her friends, although exceedingly free and easy, were morally quite as circumspect as certain ladies he had met in other walks of life. They were self-reliant, and their indifference to some of the rules of society was in itself a safeguard. They were not in the habit of concealing their thoughts, or expressing certain things with their lips and fostering entirely different sentiments in their hearts. Cecil, alone, compared more than favourably with Edwin ; he was welcomed in the gay circle, and gradually succumbed to the numerous and varied attractions around him.

His training taught him that at the rate he was spending money there must, in the course of twelve months, be a financial crash. This caused him to consider the offer of money Edwin Swinton had made, not altogether with a disinterested motive.

Edwin's note made it almost imperative that he should come to a decision. Was he to help him with Olive, or merely allow matters to take their course ? He believed he had influence with his sister, and that words of commendation for Edwin Swinton would tell in his favour. He read the letter two or three times, and gradually saw through the writer's motives. In plain words it amounted to this, " You help me, and I will help you." It proposed a bargain, and Cecil disliked the idea, if Olive was to form part of it. Debt is a hard taskmaster, and uses a heavy whip, driving desperately, and generally along the wrong road. Cecil had just commenced to feel the pull at the bit ; at first the reins were held loosely, now they tugged, and metaphorically he shook his head in protest.

Delivered with Edwin's epistle were three letters, one from Lilian Freelight, which gave him much satisfaction, although it meant spending money, the others from his tailor and the livery-stable keeper. They were not calculated to make him smile ; they were polite but firm requests for payment.

This decided Cecil, and before he had time to change his mind he wrote to Edwin Swinton and Olive. Neither letter gave him satisfaction ; he was sorely tempted to cast Olive's into the fire. He felt mean ; trying to persuade himself he was right, at the same time knowing he was wrong, a very unsatisfactory task. He posted Edwin's letter, but carried Olive's about in his pocket until night ; then he dropped it in a letter-box, inwardly hoping it would be lost. The post office does not trust to chance, and the letters were duly delivered.

Edwin was delighted; Olive was surprised, slightly puzzled. Although living in the country, and innocently girlish, she was quick-witted, and could see through many things that would have escaped notice from folks considering themselves sharp.

She wondered if Edwin Swinton had written to her brother, suggesting certain matters in his letter. She dismissed the thought as unworthy, because had Swinton done so, Cecil would have refused to follow his hint—of this she felt sure. Her brother's letter was not calculated to arouse suspicion of collusion; he had carefully worded it, merely written in high terms of Edwin because he casually mentioned his being at Eagle Hurst, which led up to it.

Edwin's letter was outspoken. Cecil said, without mincing words, that if Edwin wished seriously to become engaged to Olive he ought to give up Lilian Freelight—and others. On this condition he would help him, but not otherwise. Later on he wrote he had written to Olive, at which Edwin laughed, and his face was also wreathed in smiles as he read that Cecil was troubled with that irritating complaint, shortness of money.

"I can relieve him on that score," said Edwin to himself. "I promised to do it. I'll send him a cheque for twenty-five pounds; it will help him along a bit, and it won't do me any harm. As for Lilian and the others, we'll see about them. If all goes well with Olive, of course I'll drop them; but until that's settled I see no reason to do so. It strikes me Cecil's smitten with Lilian. I must go to town and keep my eye on him."

Cecil's letter influenced Olive as he anticipated, and she was more affable with Edwin Swinton the next time they met. She did not avoid him, and Mr. Havers had seen them together on two or three occasions, but he hardly thought he was called upon to interfere.

One morning, however, Edwin made the plunge, and asked Olive to marry him. His proposal was unexpected, and startled her; she had not given a thought to marriage. He gathered hope from the fact that she did not at once answer his question; she was too amazed at his proposition. He repeated his words, growing more eloquent in pleading his cause, and she realised some answer was expected.

The first shock over she was not at all confused. She told him in a straightforward manner she had never thought of marriage, that his proposal was unexpected, that her father in any case must be consulted.

Edwin gathered more hopes from this.

"If your father consents, will you be my wife, Olive?"

She smiled at him as she replied—

"You mistake me. I was merely generalising. I meant that my father would have to be consulted, no matter who honoured me with a proposal."

She then explained that she could not accept him. She regarded him as an old friend, a playmate, and hoped always to be on familiar terms with him, but as for marrying him, well, she was sorry, but it was out of the question.

Edwin Swinton was disappointed, but not cast down—perhaps he had been too precipitate; he would try again.

"We can, as you say, be familiar friends, and perhaps some day you may change your mind—I hope so—because whatever happens I shall always love you. I feel a better man when I am with you." This was quite true, and not to be wondered at, considering the purity of Olive's mind and her many excellent characteristics.

"I am glad to hear you say this," she said. "I hope to be always able to influence you for good."

"I am sure you will." Then suddenly, "Have you heard anything ill of me, Olive?"

This straight question confused her for a moment; she knew both her father and Mr. Foyle were not prepossessed in his favour. Next to her father's she valued the Squire's opinion.

"I see you have," he said. "I will not ask you what you have heard, but I implore you not to believe ill of me. True, I have done no work, but I have an ample fortune—for two—and there are hundreds more like me. Mr. Foyle does not work, he merely exercises himself pleasurably," he said, smiling. He had an idea his stepfather might have given him only a moderate character.

"Mr. Foyle has worked hard, and I am sure he does a great deal of good with his money," she said.

"I acknowledge that; still, he has a large fortune. He does not exercise much self-denial in distributing some of it among people less well off," he said.

"You must not say one word against the Squire if you want to keep in my good books," she said, smiling, then added earnestly—

"I am very fond of him; he is a dear, kind, large-hearted man."

CHAPTER XIV

ROTTEN ROW

AFTER Olive's refusal Edwin Swinton thought it better to return to London for a time, and she felt relieved at his departure. She told her father of the proposal and her refusal, and he was very pleased at her conduct.

"I do not think you would be happy with him," he said. "I am glad you refused him; the Squire will be glad, too."

"Why?" asked Olive, surprised.

"Because he takes a great interest in you, my dear girl," said the Vicar.

Olive laughed as she said, "Does he? I am delighted; it makes me feel quite important."

Cecil Havers dined with Edwin the night he returned to town, and asked what news he had brought from Poolbank and Eagle Hurst.

"I had a very fair time," said Edwin. "For one thing the Squire was away; he's in Paris, gay old bird, eh? I had the place to myself; it's big enough, goodness knows; I always feel lost in it."

"You saw Olive several times, I suppose?" said Cecil.

"Yes; we went walks and had talks," said Edwin.

The Little Wonder

"Satisfactory, I hope?" ventured Cecil.

"So, so; not altogether. She refused me."

"You proposed to her!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Yes; what is there to be surprised at?"

"Rather sudden, was it not?"

"Oh, I don't know; we've been playfellows for years."

"But she never regarded you in that light."

"How do you know?"

"Because marriage did not enter into her calculations."

"She's nearly twenty-one," said Edwin.

"There's plenty of time," said Cecil. "Was it a decided refusal?"

"Well, no, not exactly: at least I did not take it as such. I told her I should always love her, no matter what happened."

"How did she take that?" asked Cecil.

"Said she hoped we should always be familiar friends. I asked her if any one had spoken ill of me, and I saw by her face some one had said ill-natured things. I hinted it might be the Squire. My word, didn't she flare up. What do you think she said?"

"Tell me," said Cecil.

"Said I must not say a word against the Squire, that she is very fond of him, and that he is a dear, kind, large-hearted man."

Cecil laughed.

"She always had a good opinion of Mr. Foyle," he said.

"It's a blessing he's old enough to be her father; there's no danger in that quarter."

"Of course not," laughed Cecil, "it would be ridiculous."

"You can help me with Olive," said Edwin. "Don't let it drop. tell her from time to time what a spotless character I bear."

"But you don't," said Cecil.

"Never mind, whitewash me," said Edwin.

"It will not be fair to her if you continue to carry on with the Frolic girls," said Cecil.

"I like that, upon my word I do," said Edwin. "Carry on! I'd like to know what you have been doing during my absence?"

"Enjoying myself," said Cecil, laughing; "but I have no wish to be engaged."

"Then because I have proposed to Olive, and have been refused, I must give up ladies' society; is that what you desire?"

"By no means; but if you continue to think of my sister as a wife you ought to be careful how you act."

"I'll promise you, if Olive will accept my offer, I'll throw up the whole lot."

Before they parted Cecil, at Edwin's request, told him how matters stood financially.

"A couple of hundred pounds will clear you," said Edwin. "I'll lend you that, and you can pay it any time; it won't hurt me if I do not get it back at all."

Cecil wavered, hesitating whether to accept this offer. It would clear off all his debts and leave a balance in his favour; it was very tempting. He knew, however, that if he took the money he must try and help Edwin to win Olive. After all, there was no reason why he should not do so; if Olive declined to accept him it would not be his fault, and she was too strong-willed to be influenced by him against her inclinations.

Edwin Swinton lent Cecil the two hundred pounds. This freed him from debt; but he was still held in bondage, for Edwin meant to use it as a lever to force him, if necessary, to assist him in his plans regarding Olive. It did not take Edwin long to find out that Cecil had considerably advanced in favour with Lilian Freelicht and the other girls. He considered he had a prior claim on Lilian's friendship, and told her so. She laughed, and said if he buried himself in the country for several weeks he must not expect her to go about unattended.

"Perhaps there is some attraction at Poolbank; a rustic beauty whose cheeks are reddened by nature, and not by rouge, and whose eyes are brilliant without frequent applications of belladonna," said Lilian, who used aids to beauty sparingly, and could therefore talk about them with impunity.

"I never saw a rustic beauty to compare with you," he said.

"But there are such things at Poolbank?"

"Possibly; they didn't come in my way."

"No, I don't suppose they would be in the way; you would be only too pleased to meet them."

"I assure you I longed for the time to come when I should see you again."

"And pray what kept you away from me? Why did you not cease to long? You are your own master," she said.

"I thought the air was doing me good."

Lilian laughed as she said—

"I don't see much change for the better; you still look seedy."

"I never felt better."

"Then go back to Poolbank; you may have a relapse here."

"And leave you to Cecil Havers?"

She nodded, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

"Lilian, you are an incorrigible flirt."

"Am I? And pray what constitutes a flirt?"

"A flirt is a girl who carries on with half a dozen fellows at the same time."

"Surrounded by a bevy of admirers, that is."

"There's a difference between admirers and objects of flirtation," he said.

"Explain it."

"An admirer stands off at a respectful distance; a man you flirt with draws nearer the flame."

"Then you are a male flirt, I suppose," said Lilian.

"There's no such thing," he said.

"The flirts are all females?" said Lilian.

"Yes, that is so."

"I differ with you. The male flirt is strongly in evidence at times."

For instance, when a young man neglects his town girl and flies to his country girl, he becomes a country flirt instead of a town flirt," laughed Lilian.

"I suppose you mean to apply that to me?"

"Most decidedly; I consider you a very fair specimen of the male flirt."

"Exhibit me," he said.

"One only shows curiosities," she replied, "and a male flirt is a common thing; I see scores of them daily—all ages all sizes and shapes; some grey-headed, many of the bald kind."

"Where are they to be found?" asked Edwin, amused at her prattle.

"You'll find several kinds in Regent Street, doing the block, ogling the girls, horrid old things! Then I can point out a lot more in the Park; some of them are tottering, but they still decorate themselves in the mode male flirt, and prop themselves up with a stick as they stagger along," said Lilian.

"I'll keep my eyes open and look out for specimens," said Edwin.

"Do. You may admire them. I think them detestable," she said.

Mr. Foyle kept several horses at his town house stables, and frequently rode in the Park. On his return from Paris he did not go back to Eagle Hurst, but remained in London a few days.

He visited the warehouses of Foyle, Wharnccliffe and Co. four or five times a year, sometimes more, and was conversant with the routine of the business. He enjoyed a chat with Montague Wharnccliffe, also with his sister, and spent several evenings at their house.

Edwin Swinton did not know the Squire was in town, and when he met him in the Row, as he was riding with Lilian Freelight, he experienced a slight shock. Lilian did not notice the fine, handsome man on the bay horse, but Edwin could not mistake him. Had Mr. Foyle seen them he showed no sign of recognition, and as a matter of fact he had not, but Edwin thought to the contrary. When they reached the corner he said to Lilian, "Shall we go now?"

"It is early yet; let us have another turn or two," she answered.

There was no help for it but to comply and risk meeting Mr. Foyle again. There was no particular reason why he should avoid the Squire when he was with Lilian, except that if he saw them together his stepfather would probably mention it in Olive's presence, and Edwin had no desire for this.

As they rode back they again met the Squire, and this time, seeing Edwin with a lady, he raised his hat and thought—

"What a pretty girl; I have seen her somewhere I am sure."

"Who is that handsome gentleman?" said Lilian.

Edwin laughed as he said, "That is my stepfather."

"Not Mr. Foyle!"

"Yes."

"Oh, I should like to know him!" exclaimed Lilian.

Edwin gave an exclamation of surprise, which in vain he tried to check when too late.

Lilian tossed her pretty head disdainfully as she said, "I suppose that means such a thing is impossible."

"My dear Lilian," he began.

"Don't dear me. You're horrid! I will speak to him, see if I don't"; and she turned her hack sharply round.

"Lilian!" called Edwin in dismay. She was cantering down the Row and did not hear him; there was nothing for it but to follow. He caught up to her, and as he saw Mr. Foyle in the distance dreaded what would happen; after all she might only be in fun.

Lilian was not in fun, she was in deadly earnest; that exclamation of surprise on Edwin's part was too much for her.

She saw Mr. Foyle coming and said to Edwin—

"If you do not ride up to him and introduce me, I'll go myself."

"You really mean it?"

"Really!" she drawled sarcastically.

Mr. Foyle was surprised when they rode up, but greeted them in his usual gentlemanly way. He leaned over his horse and shook hands with Lilian.

"Miss Freelight," he said. "The name is familiar, of course; my jockey is Harry Freelight; I seem to know your face well."

"I am his sister," she said.

Mr. Foyle was pleased to meet her.

"I am also an actress at the Frolic Theatre," said Lilian, with a sly look at Edwin, which caused Mr. Foyle to smile as he saw the annoyance on his face.

"And a very talented actress too, by all accounts," said Mr. Foyle.

Lilian smiled at him; she looked bewitching in her riding-habit.

"My brother has often spoken of you to me," she said.

"I hope he gives me a good character," said Mr. Foyle, smiling.

"He says you are the most generous master he ever had, and I can believe it now," said Lilian.

The compliment implied was so evidently sincere that Mr. Foyle could not help feeling pleased.

As for Edwin he looked so uncomfortable that Mr. Foyle said again—

"I am very glad to have met you, Miss Freelight. Take care of her, Edwin."

He raised his hat and cantered down the Row.

"He's splendid," said Lilian. "Not a bit proud. Why did you object to introduce me?"

"I did not object."

"Oh, yes, you did. I'm not a fool, Edwin, not by a long way, and I shan't forget it," said Lilian.

CHAPTER XV

OLD SCENES, OLD FRIENDS

"I was introduced to your sister the other day," said Mr. Foyle to Harry Freelight as they rode on to the Heath on their cobs.

"Jolly girl, Lilian," said the jockey.

"A charming girl too," said Mr. Foyle. "She was riding in the Row with my stepson, Edwin Swinton."

He watched his companion's face as he spoke, and saw he was not at all pleased.

"You know my stepson?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"I know he is a rich young man about town."

"He seems attracted by your sister."

"Probably; I hope she does not encourage him."

"Why?"

"Because nothing good will come of it. I have advised her to keep him at a distance."

"You have done right," said Mr. Foyle.

"I am glad you think so."

"Edwin is very well off, and can marry any one who accepts him; but I do not think he is calculated to make a girl happy," said Mr. Foyle.

"You know my sister is on the stage?"

"Yes."

"At the Frolic Theatre. She is a favourite with the public; Hamill Foot the manager makes a fuss of her; if she was not level-headed she might be spoiled," said Harry.

"Why did she go on the stage?"

"She always wished to do so from a child. Our mother is an invalid, we support her; Lilian insisted on doing her share."

"You do not blame her?"

"Oh no, but I can afford to keep them both; and I wish she would leave the stage."

"It is better for her to have some occupation."

"You really think so?"

"I am sure of it; and I am not prejudiced. What harm is there in a girl appearing on the stage? If she is talented it is the proper place for her; that is, if it is necessary to earn her living."

Harry Freelight was relieved to hear Mr. Foyle's opinion; it made him more contented when he thought of Lilian.

It was now Spring, and the horses at Newmarket were all doing strong work. The town is a wonderful place; horses everywhere, and the streets filled with men and boys who can easily be recognised as being connected with racing-stables.

Bert Crisp had a strong team at Dinmore House, and looked forward to a successful season. Dan, since his arrival, had learned a good deal, and in the six weeks he had been there proved himself a capable lad on a horse. Mr. Foyle was not slow to notice the improvement in him, and Harry Freelight told him Dan was one of the most promising youngsters he had seen for a long time.

"You think he will make a jockey?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"Yes; he is cut out for one, and his size is in his favour," said Harry.

That morning, Dan rode in his first trial, having the mount on a two-year old of considerable promise. Harry Freelight also rode in it, and when Dan almost got up in time on the post and really beat him, he was rather surprised.

He told Crisp that Dan rode with his head, and that his judgment for so young a lad was wonderful. Mr. Foyle was surprised at Dan's performance, and at the stables, later on, gave him a sovereign, and told him to go on as well as he had begun and he would soon be able to ride in races. Dan was very proud of being recognised by the Squire, who seldom spoke to any of the lads; and his favouritism, as they called it, caused some jealousy. Dan, however, was popular, and the majority of the lads not envious.

During the next twelve months Dan made such rapid progress that it was determined to give him a trial, and put him up in an Apprentices Race. Mr. Foyle was consulted and agreed to it. The past season had been highly successful for the Dinmore stable, although Bert Crisp thought they had bad luck not to wind up with a win in the Manchester November Handicap, in which race Daisy ran fourth, and her trainer was confident had she a clear run she would have won. Stormlight pulled off a couple of races and paid for his oats; as a schoolmaster to the youngsters he was as reliable as ever.

Edwin Swinton frequently visited Poolbank during the year, but had not again proposed to Olive, he meant to do so later on; in the meantime he never alluded to the subject, and she was consequently on very friendly terms with him.

When Dan had been at Newmarket twelve months he obtained a fortnight's leave of absence. A week of this he spent on the *Merry Belle* with Josiah Fudge and his wife. It was a rare treat for the worthy couple to have the lad with them again, if only for a few days. Nancy made a great fuss for a week before Dan's arrival. She had been busily preparing for him, laying in a stock of dainties such as Josiah had never seen on the boat before.

He opened his eyes wide when she disclosed the extent of her stores, wondering how she had accumulated them, for there had been no extra demands on his purse.

"They're all paid for, I suppose?" he said.

Nancy fired up at this, asking him to name the time when she had run up a bill.

"Paid for!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Of course they are, and out of the money I have saved. I didn't think you'd be so mean as to make such an insinuation. You've spoilt all my pleasure in getting them together; it's too bad of you after all these years," and Nancy put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Josiah looked sheepish, he could not bear to see Nancy in tears; he apologised humbly, and kissed her. In due course she became pacified, and agreed to forgive him.

The cabin was as clean as scrubbing and scouring could make it; new prints covered the chairs and lockers, a specially taken photograph of old Weather Glass had been framed and hung up, and a picture of the Poolbank hounds faced it. Dan's photo, sent from Newmarket, occupied the place of honour. Nancy was very proud of this, for Dan held in his hand the whip Josiah had given him on behalf of Nancy and himself.

Dan came on board at one of the locks, about forty miles from Poolbank

and his reception was so hearty that he was much affected. He darted about the *Merry Belle* like a squirrel, Josiah said, peering into every familiar nook and corner, feeling quite at home again, reviving memories of the life he had left behind. He was so loud in his praises of the cabin that Nancy felt amply recompensed for the trouble she had taken.

The first meal was a revelation. Josiah and Dan stared at the variety of dishes, and Nancy had to break the spell by helping them liberally.

"We don't fare like this every day," said Josiah, as a kind of apology for such profusion.

"Dan is not always here," said Nancy.

"If we're to be catered for like this, I wish he'd turn up once a week at least," laughed Josiah.

Dan slept well on the *Merry Belle* the first night: but when he awoke in the morning it was some time before he understood where he was: the surroundings, once so familiar, were half forgotten.

After breakfast he took a turn on the towing-path, and Josiah kept up a running conversation, shouting so that none of his words should be missed.

He remained on the boat during the time she took in cargo and on the trip to Poolbank. Arriving there, he left, and walked to Eli's, but promised to spend another night with Josiah before he returned to Newmarket.

Eli's welcome was as hearty as Josiah's and Nancy's. On the way through Poolbank, Dan was frequently stopped, and had to answer a running fire of questions about life at Newmarket. There was not a lad in Poolbank did not envy him; they all had sudden ambitions to be jockeys. How neat and dapper Dan looked—quite a little swell—and what a tiny fellow he was; he seemed to have become smaller. They followed him admiringly. Dan was amused at the sensation he caused. As he passed the store the manager asked him how the whip suited him, to which Dan replied that so far he had not had much chance of using it; the horses there had plenty of go in them.

How quiet it was in Eli's cottage; it seemed shut out from the world. And not a sound was heard at night, except an occasional bark from a watchdog or the lowing of cattle.

Eli and Dan sat talking, the lamp showing a pleasant light on the old oak table.

Eli asked scores of questions, some of which amused Dan vastly. When he said there were hundreds of race-horses exercised on the Heath—many of them worth thousands of pounds—Eli shook his head in disbelief, and was very hard to convince.

"And do they put a little nipper like you up on a 'orse worth thousands?" asked Eli.

"Sometimes," said Dan. "We don't think much of it," he added indifferently.

"Doan't think much on it?" said Eli. "Doan't think much o' straddling across a 'orse worth thousands a pounds? It 'ud seem to me like sitting on bags o' gold. Crisp must be a rum 'un to trust you up there."

Dan laughed as he said, "Some one has to ride them."

"If I'd a 'orse worth a thousand pounds, I'd—"

"What would you do with him?"

"Nothin', I'd be afeared to handle so much money," said Eli.

"But he'd want feeding."

"Do they eat like ordinary 'osses?" asked Eli.

"Yes; but the best of corn and hay."

One morning Dan visited the Eagle Hurst stables, where he was shown his old friend, Weather Glass. She recognised him, which delighted Dan; and he thought what a change for the better there was in her appearance as he stroked her smooth coat.

"You've got a better billet than you had with Josiah," he said. "Fancy a thoroughbred like you tugging the *Merry Belle* so many miles."

"There's something else for you to see," said Ben Rose, the stud groom.

"Some new mares?" asked Dan.

"No; your old friend's pedigree," he replied.

He took Dan into his room and showed him the tabulated pedigree of Storm.

"Mr. Foyle found out all about her," he said. "She's Storm right enough: no doubt about it. We call her Weather Glass, because one name's as good as another, and she seems to know it best. There's another thing, Dan."

"What is it?"

"She's going to have a foal; I'm pretty near sure of it," said Ben.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NURSERY

It was in an Apprentices Race at Newmarket Dan had his first mount, and, although unsuccessful, his style of riding pleased Crisp. He rode a horse named Bayswater, an unreliable customer, who had thrown more than one race away by shirking at the finish. This was precisely what happened when Dan rode him in the Apprentices Race. Crisp warned him the horse was a bad finisher, and said if once Bayswater got going he must keep him at it, or he would be all over the course at the finish. The distance was a mile, and at the post the horse seemed to be in a good humour. There were ten runners, evenly matched, and most of the riders were novices, so that Dan was fairly confident. When they went away to a good start Bayswater shook his head and hung fire, but Dan coaxed him, and after covering four furlongs—the course was a mile—the horse was in a better humour. The leader, however, was a long way ahead, and Dan thought there was little hope of catching him; still there was nothing like trying, and bearing in mind what the trainer told him he kept Bayswater going. Dan felt his pulses tingle as he heard the shouts from the stands; he wished they had been for Bayswater instead of Harold, the favourite, who was striding up the rise four lengths in front of the field, apparently winning easily.

He had no whip; Bayswater would not stand punishment, consequently he used his legs and hands to urge him on. Crisp was surprised to see the horse finishing at such a pace; it was unusual, and he put it down to Dan's riding. He had seen the start and the bad position Bayswater held for four furlongs, and had not expected to see him make up so much ground.

Dan passed several horses and managed to finish in third place, a position he had not expected to occupy.

The trainer said, when he had weighed in—

"You rode a good race, and Bayswater finished closer than I, expected, especially after being in the rear for half the distance."

Dan was glad he was satisfied.

"If I had had a whip I might have done better," he said.

But Crisp smiled as he replied—

"Lads are better without whips. Do you know what would have happened had you hit Bayswater?"

"No."

"He would have stopped; he has not pluck enough to stand the whip."

Dan overheard an argument in the boys' room the same night about his riding of Bayswater. From it he gathered that the horse had a bad reputation, and that the majority of the lads considered he had done well to get him into the third place.

Being entitled to the five pound allowance, Dan was put up in races several times during this season and at the Windsor meeting, in September, he won a race that at once brought him into prominence and attracted a lot of attention.

In the Merry Wives of Windsor Nursery Handicap, Mr. Foyle had a colt entered, of which he thought highly. Black Legs had run four times during the season without earning a winning bracket. He had been highly tried, and in April was expected to do great things; it was now the middle of September and he had failed to score.

In all his races Harry Freelight had ridden him, so no fault could be found on the score of jockeyship. Harry, however, was not satisfied that Black Legs' performances were genuine; he firmly believed the colt refused to try for him: in fact, had taken a prejudice against him. Mr. Foyle laughed at the idea. So did Crisp, but the jockey was more than ever convinced when he rode him for the fourth time.

"He won't go a yard for me when I ask him," he said. "You had better put some one else up next time. Why not try Dan? He's ridden him at exercise."

The trainer was aware that horses sometimes disliked certain jockeys, through no fault of theirs, and that the antipathy is not easily accounted for. One thing was certain, Black Legs had never run in public anything like up to his form in private.

"If he can do five furlongs on the track faster than any youngster we have in the stable, there's no reason why he should not show the same speed in a race. There may be something in what you say, and I'll consult Mr. Foyle about it," said Crisp.

This was done, and the Squire said if Harry Freelight thought a change of riders would do good, by all means put another jockey up. He doubted, however, if Dan had the experience necessary to ride such an uncertain colt as Black Legs.

Crisp showed the Squire's letter to the jockey, who said—

"Tell Mr. Foyle I am quite certain Dan Hind will get as much out of the colt as any one."

"If Dan rides him at Windsor and wins, the public are sure to make uncomplimentary remarks about your handling of him; remember, he has been well backed on three occasions," said Crisp.

"Let them say what they like," laughed Harry. "It will not matter to me. If the colt takes to Dan, he'll win; if not, he'll run no better than he did when I rode him. It's not a question of riding, it's a question of finding a jockey Black Legs likes."

"Of course, whatever is said will make no difference to Mr. Foyle or myself; but I don't wish to see disparaging comparisons drawn between an apprentice and our crack jockey," said Crisp.

Harry laughed as he said—

"Don't worry yourself about that. If Dan wins on him so much the better; it will bear out my opinion of the colt."

"And that is?" asked the trainer.

"That if Black Legs had done his best he would have won three races out of the four I have ridden him in," said Harry.

"If that is your opinion we had better back him at Windsor on the chance of his doing his best for Dan," said the trainer.

"I shall certainly have a trifle on him," said Harry.

When it was finally decided Dan should ride Black Legs, and he was told the reason, he felt anxious. Harry Freelight had been very kind to him, and he had no wish to win a race at the jockey's expense. Dan knew sufficient of racing to be aware that when a change of jockeys proves successful, slighting remarks are made about the losing rider.

Rather timidly he approached Harry Freelight and hinted at this.

"You had better ride him," he said; "he'll perhaps win for you this time."

Harry shook his head as he replied—

"He'll not win for me, Dan; you have a try at him, and I hope you'll do better than I have."

The Squire was present at Windsor, as he was anxious and curious to see how Black Legs would run for Dan.

Windsor being a handy meeting for Londoners, Edwin Swinton and Cecil Havers agreed to motor there. Edwin had purchased a motor during the season and fancied himself an expert driver—his chauffeur thought different, and was always ready to handle the car. The Squire was not prejudiced against motors: he had two at Eagle Hurst, but seldom used them unless for long journeys, or when he was in a hurry—he much preferred driving.

Considering it was only a one day meeting, early in the week, and a

prospect of small fields, there was a good attendance. Some fair two-year-olds were in the Nursery, and this five furlong sprint was attractive. Black Legs, although his reputation was not good, was always expected to do something out of the common and retrieve his character. Racing men had confidence in Bert Crisp; they also knew Mr. Foyle always ran straight, and that the orange jacket and purple cap were sported to win. It was an encouraging sign to see Mr. Foyle on the course; it augured well for the success of Black Legs at last; he would not have come to Windsor unless he was sanguine of seeing his colt win. In consequence of the Squire's presence becoming generally known, there was a run on Black Legs as soon as the bookmakers commenced business, a short time before the numbers went up.

Nine starters appeared on the board, and before the names of the jockeys appeared it was taken as a matter of course that Harry Freelight would have the mount on Black Legs. There was something like consternation when Dan Hind's name appeared as the rider of number seven. What did it mean? why was Freelight standing down? Inquiries were made, and the rumour circulated that Dan Hind was put up because Harry Freelight considered Black Legs had no chance, and asked to be excused riding him. Had the jockey ridden Black Legs, he would have declared three pounds over weight; as it was, Dan claimed a five pound allowance, which made a lot of difference in the colt's favour.

Saxony was a hot favourite—even money being taken freely; on paper it looked a very good thing for him.

When it was seen Dan Hind had the mount on Black Legs, he went back in the market, and eventually eight to one was on offer.

Edwin Swinton drove his motor on to the course, and after a hasty lunch, went into the ring; Cecil Havers remained in the car. He asked Mr. Foyle what he thought of Black Legs' chance, and the Squire told him exactly how matters stood.

"Is he worth backing?" persisted Edwin.

"You must use your own judgment about that. Harry Freelight thinks he may run better in Dan's hands; but I confess I doubt it."

"Saxony is a good colt," said Edwin.

"He is; quite entitled to the position of favourite," said the Squire.

Edwin Swinton hesitated; he hardly liked to back Black Legs with a reliable horse like Saxony in the race. He went back to the car, and in answer to Cecil's inquiries, said he had done nothing.

"Did you see Mr. Foyle?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

Edwin told him; and Cecil said—

"I wish you would put me a couple of pounds on—"

"Black Legs?"

"Yes. What's his price?"

"Eight to one."

"That's good; I'll risk it."

He handed Edwin a couple of sovereigns, and he crossed the course into Tattersall's. Meeting a commissioner he knew, he asked his opinion of the race.

"It looks a good thing for Saxony," was the reply.

"What about Black Legs?"

The man smiled as he said—

"He's too uncertain for my money, but he's been backed to win a fair amount. I wonder why they put that youngster up instead of Harry?"

"Because Harry thinks the colt will not do his best for him; he suggested putting Hind up."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Yes; Mr. Foyle told me."

"That makes all the difference. If Harry's opinion is correct, the colt may win; I'll save a bit on him, anyway."

"Then you advise me to back both?"

"Black Legs and Saxony? Yes," said the man.

This Edwin did, and also put Cecil's two pounds on Black Legs. He then went back to the car to watch the race—crossing the track just before the horses went down to the post.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE LITTLE WONDER"

As Bert Crisp lifted Dan into the saddle, he watched Black Legs anxiously but there was no sign of hostility. Contrary to his usual custom, the colt walked out of the paddock quietly, and when Dan cantered him past the stands he showed no temper, going along with a free and easy stride. With Harry Freelight in the saddle some trouble had generally been experienced in getting him to the post. Black Legs was expected to "perform," and seldom disappointed.

"What did I tell you?" said Harry, as he watched the horse.

"He's certainly behaving better so far," said Crisp; "but wait until the race begins; he'll play up then, I expect."

"I don't think so; he's taken to Dan," said the jockey.

Mr. Foyle was of the same opinion, and said Harry was right in recommending Dan for the mount; he also thought it was a generous action on the jockey's part to give the lad a chance. Dan felt a flutter of excitement as Black Legs went down to the start. He thought this race was to be the turning-point in his career; something told him such was the case. If he won it would be a feather in his cap, and he never meant to forget that Harry Freelight had given him this opportunity. It was only a minor event, a five-furlong dash, but for him it might be the most important race in his life. Not much notice was taken of Dan by the other jockeys; they thought Harry Freelight had declined the mount, or asked to be let off; therefore the colt had no chance. The rider of Saxony, Bruce Davis, was a

keen rival of Harry Freelight's ; when he saw Dan on Black Legs he smiled as he thought, "Harry's had enough of the brute ; he can't have any chance with that nipper up."

Trouble began when the horses lined up at the post. First the favourite skirmished across in front of the others and bumped against Black Legs, who for the first time showed temper and lashed out. Dan sat still, soothing him, whistling softly, but the colt backed and refused to join his horses.

"Bring him up," shouted the starter.

This was easier said than done. Dan tried and coaxed, but all to no purpose. Black Legs dug his toes in and refused to budge.

Mr. Foyle saw what had happened through his glasses, and said, "He's playing his pranks again. I'm afraid Dan will have a nasty ride."

"If he gets off he'll be all right," said Harry. "Something has put him out."

"Saxony bumped him ; that's caused the trouble," growled Crisp.

The starter despaired of getting them off, and made up his mind to let the barrier go, when Black Legs suddenly changing his tactics, rushed between Saxony and Green Lawn, almost upsetting them.

"Look out !" shouted the jockeys. This occurred at an unfortunate moment, for the starter touched the spring, and the tapes flew up while the field was "at sixes and sevens." As it happened it was as fair for one as another, and the start was not a bad one after all.

Being only five furlongs, there was no time to lose, and when Dan saw Green Lawn dash to the front he sent Black Legs after him. For a second he thought it was no start, but quickly changed his mind.

Saxony was alongside Mr. Foyle's colt, with two others close up. Green Lawn had a couple of lengths to the good.

Bruce Davis smiled as he took in the situation. He was in the centre with a clear run, and knew Saxony could easily beat Green Lawn. As for Black Legs, he never entered into his calculations.

"That's the rummiest start I've seen for a long time," said Crisp ; "but they have got away fairly well."

"What's that leading ?" asked Harry, who had no glasses.

"Green Lawn."

"Saxony and Black Legs are close together, a couple of lengths behind," said Mr. Foyle.

Davis expected Black Legs to fall back, and was surprised when he kept his place. He urged his mount forward, and the orange jacket still kept alongside. He caught Green Lawn, so did Dan, and they passed him at the end of the second furlong. Three furlongs were covered, and still Black Legs was on the premises. Davis roused up Saxony and tried to shake him off.

Two delighted young men were balancing on the seat of Edwin Swinton's motor-car. The orange jacket was conspicuous, and they both wanted it to come first past the post.

"He'll beat the favourite!" exclaimed Cecil.

"Looks like it," said Edwin. "I'm glad I had a bit on. It's a bit of a let down for Harry."

"You mean the other jockey?" said Cecil.

"Yes."

"Why is it?"

"Because he's not won on him. If Dan manages it, people will blame him for not handling the colt properly."

Bruce Davis had a harder task than he imagined. Black Legs was running a very different race this time. He did not want to be beaten by an apprentice

Saxony had a big weight, but he was a strong, powerful colt. His speed was undeniable, and the big plunging stable in which he was trained had put down their money in earnest. They never thought of defeat, not even a furlong from home, when Black Legs was still hanging on to Saxony.

There was tremendous excitement on the stands. Hundreds of people, who had lost on Black Legs before, were on him again, hoping for better luck. Many more deserted him and backed Saxony.

The two colts were neck and neck at the half distance. It was evident there was to be a desperate finish.

Mr. Foyle, usually calm at such moments, betrayed his excitement in his face. Harry Freelight looked as pleased as though he was riding Black Legs, and felt no spark of jealousy against Dan. The trainer looked anxious; he doubted whether Dan would be equal to beating Bruce in a slashing finish.

Once Dan made a move to raise his whip, suddenly thought better of it, and Crisp, smiling as he saw it, muttered, "Good lad; plenty of nerve, rides like an old 'un."

Bruce Davis saw the movement and gave a sigh of relief.

"He's done!" he thought.

Black Legs was anything but done. Dan was certain the colt caught sight of his move to raise the whip; for a brief space his ears went back; then, as he felt no stroke, he seemed to dash forward to indicate Dan had done right.

Black Legs' head was in front of Saxony's, and there came a terrific roar from the ring, "The favourite's beat!"

"Not a bit of it," said one enthusiastic admirer, who happened to be right.

Saxony was not beaten; he drew up level again, Davis riding desperately.

Cecil Havers, wildly excited, slipped on the slimy cushion of the motor seat, his legs shot out, and he fell backwards into the chauffeur's arms. Edwin laughed, and almost went overboard too; the chauffeur looked on with a serene air; he disdained such public exhibitions of enthusiasm.

Dan was certainly showing how he could ride. Now that the critical moment had come he felt clear-headed and calm; something told him Black Legs would win.

Bruce Davis gave a hasty glance at the lad's set face, and knew there was no lack of courage there. Saxony would have won this race four times

out of six, but on this occasion Black Legs was in a good humour, was doing his best, and revelling in his work.

Dan heard the deafening shouts, the names of the horses, the varied cries of a racecourse throng watching a desperate finish, and the medley of sounds made music in his ears and heralded a victory.

He sat still on Black Legs while the colt fought out the battle to the end, in his own way; had Dan tried to enforce any commands, the result would have been disastrous.

Many old hands, as they saw the tiny lad so self-possessed, knew that here was a jockey who would rise to the top of the tree, and they determined to bear this performance in mind.

"Black Legs wins easily," said Mr. Foyle joyfully.

"Not by much, but as you say, easily," said the trainer; "Dan's not moved on him."

"He's riding a great race."

"I'm glad I gave you good advice," smiled Harry; "Black Legs would not have done that for me."

The excitement continued until the horses passed the post, when the verdict was given to Black Legs by a neck.

The clever people behind the favourite were astonished, could not make it out at all. What was Bruce up to to allow a little chap like that to beat him?

In the jockey's room, after the race, Harry Freelight shook hands with Dan, and said, "You have made a name for yourself to-day; mind and keep up your reputation."

"It's all owing to you," said Dan gratefully.

Harry laughed as he said, "Perhaps I had something to do with it; at any rate, no one ought to ride Black Legs but you."

Bruce Davis looked curiously at Dan. What a small lad he was, one of the lightest weights riding, he thought, but there was plenty in his head.

On all sides Dan was congratulated and made much of. The almost universal opinion was that the lad was a little wonder, and that Bert Crisp had secured a treasure, a "nugget of gold."

Black Legs was not an easy horse to ride; an experienced jockey like Harry Freelight had found this out, yet Dan had managed him, and the colt ran a true race.

It was not so much the fact of Dan doing better than Harry on Black Legs influenced people, but his defeat of Bruce Davis on such a colt as Saxony.

"There was not an ounce difference between them," said Bert Crisp. "My little fellow rode a level race with Bruce, and he's the smartest lad I ever knew."

"I think you're right," said the trainer of Saxony; "and, what's more, Bruce says the lad's a perfect little demon on a horse. He was inclined to hold him cheap at the start, but he changed his mind before the finish."

Dan was modest in the hour of victory, and even when a party of ladies surrounded him, petted and made much of him, he took it all in good part, and did not feel unduly elated. As he eyed these exquisitely dressed people, he thought—

"I wonder if they've all got as good hearts as Nancy! I must write to Josiah and tell him all about Black Legs."

Flattery was not likely to turn Dan's head.

CHAPTER XVIII

OLIVE YIELDS

SINCE Dan had been at Newmarket, Nancy noticed that Josiah took a keen interest in racing, and bought a sporting paper whenever an opportunity offered. He was not a quick reader, and it took him some time to master the contents. Nancy felt a trifle lonely, and often wished papers were not so cheap and plentiful. They had another lad from Poolbank on the *Merry Belle*, but he was not like Dan. She was kind to him, as a matter of course, it was natural to her, but she contrasted him with her favourite, and the result was unsatisfactory.

When Josiah received Dan's letter, in which he gave an account of his victory on Black Legs, he was overjoyed.

"Here's good news from Dan," he said. "He's won a great race on one of Mr. Foyle's horses, and every one is talking about him."

Nancy was as delighted as Josiah. She pored over the letter, then hid it carefully away. She had a small pile of them in a corner of her trunk.

Josiah read a glowing account of Dan's performance in his paper next morning.

"They call him 'the little wonder,'" he said, "and so he is. In a few years, my girl, he'll be earning enough to buy a dozen *Merry Belles*."

Nancy read the paper, then placed it with the letter. Everything concerning Dan was too valuable to be lightly thrown away.

"He'll be a great man in the sporting world. He'll not have much time to think about the likes of us," said Josiah.

"You're wrong," said Nancy quickly. "However high Dan rises, he will never forget his old friends."

"I hope not," said Josiah; "but money makes a heap of difference, and he'll have plenty of that by-and-by."

"It won't make no sort of difference to Dan," was Nancy's comment.

She left the boat at Poolbank and went to see old Eli. He had heard the news of Dan's success, but was nothing loath to have it related again by Nancy.

"It seems strange to me he should do so well," said Eli.

"I always knew he would," said Nancy.

"But he's been no time about it, not much over a twelvemonth."

"Nearer two years," she said.

"Goodness me, is it now!" exclaimed Eli.

They talked for some time, and Nancy made tea for them; Eli always had good tea in the cottage, he prided himself upon it, and often had visitors who took a refreshing cup with him. Tea breeds gossip, and after a time Eli said—

"There's news about, Nancy. I don't know as how you've heard it."

Nancy loved to hear of local affairs; she knew almost every one in Poolbank by name, who and where they were.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mind, I don't know whether it's correct; I've heard it, and you must keep it to yourself," said Eli.

"A secret is it?"

"None of mine; it was not told me as a secret. Phil Godson gave it as a bit o' news, nothing more."

Phil Godson was the local postman between Poolbank and four or five villages, he also delivered the letters at Eagle Hurst. Phil was an ancient institution in the district, and the postal authorities had not yet decided to abolish him. He had done his round for half a century, and said he could walk a dozen miles faster than any man half his age in Poolbank. As he boasted of this and no one took up the challenge, he put on an air of defiance whenever he mentioned the matter.

"Oh, Phil Godson!" said Nancy disdainfully.

Eli's quick ears noted the tone, and he said sharply, "Well, ain't his news as good as another man's? He's opportunities o' seein' and hearin' things as falls to the lot o' no other person round these parts."

"He makes mischief," said Nancy.

"Does he, now!" exclaimed Eli; "makes mischief! You'd better tell him so."

Nancy laughed as she said, "He tried to come between me and Josiah, and he failed."

"That wer'n't his fault," said Eli.

"Then whose fault was it?"

"Mine."

"Yours!" exclaimed Nancy.

"I always thought Josiah was not good enough for you, and I tried to put a spoke in his wheel through Phil."

Nancy laughed heartily. "Then I'll forgive him," she said. "You neither of you meant no harm."

"Certain sure we didn't, that's truth; we did it for yer good, my lass."

"All the same, Phil is a regular old woman for gossip," said Nancy.

"He seed this with his own eyes," said Eli.

"Seen what?"

Eli drew his chair closer to the table, leaned his elbows on, and looked at Nancy.

"I've told him to keep it to hisself; there's none has a greater respect for her than I have."

"Oh, there's a lady in it!" said Nancy, smiling.

"It's Miss Olive," said Eli.

Nancy looked surprised and incredulous.

"I am sure Miss Havers has done nothing to cause any one to talk about her," she said.

"But folks can't help seeing," said Eli.

"And pray what has Phil Godson seen?"

"Well, you know he cuts across the path through the wood after delivering the letters at Eagle Hurst, and he's seen Miss Olive there with Edwin Swinton."

"What of it? Is that all?" said Nancy.

"Ain't it good enough? Most of us know what he's like," said Eli.

"But he and Miss Havers have been friends since they were children," said Nancy.

"That makes the danger greater," said Eli.

"Danger!" exclaimed Nancy.

"She'll trust him because she's known him so long, and he ain't to be trusted," said Eli.

Nancy knew the old man was very fond of Olive, and that when he spoke in this strain he did so with the best intentions. She had heard of Edwin Swinton and his wild life, but she made allowances for him as he had plenty of money at his command. She thought there was nothing to talk about in Olive Havers being seen with him in the woods around Eagle Hurst, and she was angry with Phil Godson for being an old tattler.

"I'd say no more about it, if I were you," said Nancy. "Phil's a meddler, that's what he is."

"You're wrong," said Eli. "He's a good fellow. He's fond of Miss Olive, like all of us are, and he'd not like to see her fall into Swinton's hands."

"You mean he wishes to marry her?"

"That's what he's up to; I'm sure of it," said Eli.

"It is no concern of ours if she does," said Nancy.

"But it concerns me. I don't mean her to have him; he's not half good enough for her," said Eli, banging his fist on the table, and making the cups and saucers dance.

"There, there! that will do; you must not get excited about it," said Nancy. "There's no danger of Miss Olive doing anything wrong, of that you may be quite sure."

She pacified Eli, and left him convinced that Phil Godson exaggerated what he had seen; but as she walked back to the *Merry Belle* she wondered whether there was any truth in the postman's statements.

"That they were arm in arm, close together, for all the world like a pair of lovers."

There was some truth in it: Phil Godson had seen Olive and Edwin Swinton acting almost as lovers.

Cecil Havers' letters had a good deal of effect on his sister. He made frequent mention of Edwin Swinton, and also of his kindness to him; and she was grateful to him for being so friendly to Cecil.

Edwin Swinton was careful not to show himself in his true colours in Olive's presence.

For the past few months he had been in the habit of running down to

Poolbank at intervals and meeting Olive. He made himself agreeable to her; she could not help seeing he preferred her society, and that his coming to the village was mainly on her account. She was grateful also to him for not repeating his proposal; she sometimes wondered if he thought about it; with a tinge of disappointment acknowledged she saw no signs of such being the case. The more deferential he became, the more he attracted her. His ways with ladies were generally successful, and Olive gradually, almost imperceptibly, became fascinated. She commenced to look forward to meeting him; she eagerly read Cecil's letters to learn what he had to say, not about himself, but about Edwin.

At last Edwin ventured on more delicate ground, feeling his way carefully, entangling her on certain admissions, which, at the time, she considered harmless.

There was another thing. Olive had not always told her father when she met Edwin; had he asked her, she would have done so; this troubled her. She knew that twelve months ago she would have said to him, on entering the vicarage—

"Father, I have been for a walk with Edwin Swinton; I met him in the park."

Now she volunteered no such information.

Meanwhile, Edwin put pressure on Cecil Havers, who was feeling the rein grow tighter; and he wrote to Olive that he had discovered a secret. "I am sure he is in love with you," he wrote, alluding to Edwin; "he is always talking about you. He is well off, Olive, and a real good fellow. No one could have been kinder to me. I am sure he would be much kinder to you than to any one else. Of course, I mention this as it strikes me; but if you are inclined to favour him, I shall be delighted. Some people in Poolbank are prejudiced against him; I am afraid our father is, also the Squire; but I am sure they are wrong, and will own to it some day."

Olive thought a good deal about this letter. She did not conceal from herself that she was glad Edwin loved her: and acknowledged her feelings had changed towards him. She even went so far as to consider what her answer would be if he again asked her to be his wife; with a blush, she confessed it would probably not be "No."

Edwin Swinton met her, after this letter from Cecil, at a favourable moment. He saw the colour rise in her face as he took her hand, and she did not meet his eyes with the old look of mere friendship. He held her hand. She made no effort to withdraw it, and thus encouraged he spoke again.

They came to an understanding, which, although it did not altogether please him, was a step in the desired direction,

She would not accept him without her father's sanction: it would not be right, and no good would come of it. If Mr. Havers gave his consent—

"What then?" asked Edwin eagerly.

"Then I will say 'Yes,'" she said with a bright smile, which so tempted him that he kissed her. This startled her.

"You must not do that again until we are engaged," she said quietly.

CHAPTER XIX

A POSTMAN'S GOSSIP

SQUIRE FOYLE remained away from Eagle Hurst longer than usual during the racing season, but returned shortly after the Windsor races.

Olive had not spoken to her father about Edwin Swinton's proposal, nor had he an opportunity of doing so. She was troubled about the concealment—the first she remembered to have had from her father; but it was clearly Edwin's duty to speak first.

It was not long before Mr. Foyle heard rumours that Edwin and Olive Havers were often together. As a rule he took no notice of village gossip; it was uninteresting, mostly unreliable, but anything connected with Olive was worth attention. Edwin Swinton had no right to pay his attentions to Olive, when he was frequently in the company of Lilian Freelight and other actresses. Mr. Foyle resented it as an impertinence on his part.

It was from Phil Godson he had confirmation of the rumour.

The postman was proud of talking to the Squire, and Mr. Foyle was amused at the man's quaint remarks.

Phil was a keen observer of Nature in her varying moods. He was a "walking barometer," Eli said, and never failed in his prognostications about the weather. Phil predicted storms with unerring accuracy. He had even gone so far as to foretell a dire calamity at sea, which he explained he had seen in the stars. He loved all animals, and knew their haunts. Many times the attractions of life in the Eagle Hurst woods had caused delay in the delivery of letters. He knew the whereabouts of all the best foxes, and the Squire's huntsman often consulted him as to the locality of a speedy customer.

It was on account of Phil's observant mind, and general knowledge of country life, that Mr. Foyle spared time to chat with him.

During one of these conversations Phil had said that Edwin Swinton seemed to have taken a liking to the country, and he was glad of it, because it was better for him than wasting his time in town.

"You have seen him about a good deal?" said Mr. Foyle.

"Yes, many times. I thought perhaps he was looking after things in your absence," said Phil.

Mr. Foyle smiled as he said, "I think we can manage at Eagle Hurst without any supervision on his part."

"No doubt," said Phil; "and now I come to think of it, maybe it's something else he's after."

"Indeed," said Mr. Foyle. He did not care to question Phil, but was interested to hear what he had to say.

"Maybe he's after a wife," said Phil, looking sideways at him.

Mr. Foyle laughed uneasily as he said, "What causes you to think so?"

"I've seen him many times with a lady in the park."

The Squire began to feel small. Why not end the conversation, and

leave the gossiping man to go on his way. Phil was glad of the opportunity of talking to the Squire, and made the most of it. Before Mr. Foyle replied he went on—

"She's a bonnie girl, so she is, and he'll be a lucky young man if he gets her for a wife."

The Squire was on the point of asking her name, but checked himself.

"They do say as he's been a bit wild; but maybe he's none the worse for it."

"You know all the news, Phil," said the Squire, smiling.

"I go about with my eye: and ears open."

"And to good purpose."

"You're not offended with me for telling you this?" said Phil.

"Oh, dear, no; but it matters very little to me."

"I know you take an interest in the young lady," said Phil.

The Squire laughed as he said, "Do I, indeed? I know very few young ladies. Pray, who is she?"

"Miss Olive, the Vicar's daughter," said Phil.

Mr. Foyle anticipated this, at the same time it was unpleasant to hear it.

"They are very old friends," he said.

"But they've been more than friends lately," said Phil.

"You mean?" asked the Squire.

"They're lovers, or I'm no judge," said Phil, with a chuckle.

"Nonsense, man," said the Squire sharply. "I hope you will not circulate such a report."

"Not me, Squire," said Phil, rather taken aback; "but it's true all the same."

"Cannot a young lady and a young gentleman walk in my park without every fellow they meet taking them for lovers?" said the Squire.

"Yes, oh yes, of course, but——" Phil hesitated.

"Well, man, go on," said the Squire abruptly.

"I saw 'em——"

The Squire's eyes were on him; they had an angry light in them, and Phil wondered what aroused it. The look was a command, and Phil said—

"I saw 'em kiss——"

The Squire made an impatient gesture; he stepped up to Phil Godson, who fell back, frightened at the storm he had raised.

"I warn you not to repeat such lies," he said, then walked rapidly away.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Phil, looking after him. "He's a rum 'un, is our Squire! There's one thing, if he's short in his temper it's quickly over, and he never bears malice." He felt rather uneasy, however, and wished he had kept his tongue still.

Squire Foyle took the footpath through the wood, walking rapidly, hitting at branches and long bracken ferns with his stick. He was angry with himself for talking, gossiping with the postman; it served him right if he heard disagreeable things. As he cooled down he thought more calmly over what Godson had said, and felt convinced he had spoken the truth. Why should the man deceive him, there was no reason for it? On the contrary, the postman knew it would be unwise to do so.

"Seen them kiss," muttered Mr. Foyle. "I can hardly believe it, and yet it must be true; Godson would not dare to tell me such a falsehood. The young scamp," he said angrily, "he's not fit to touch her. Leaves his fast friends in town, and runs down here to bask in Olive's innocent smiles. He shan't do it, it's not fair to the girl; yet what can I do if she loves him? It's too late for me to take him in hand, he's out of control; but I'd try it if I thought it would make her happy."

He shook his head, and thought that even if he talked seriously to Edwin and induced him to live differently for a time, it would not last.

Squire Foyle had been unlucky in his matrimonial experiences; perhaps he was not altogether blameless. Edwin's mother was certainly very trying, but he had seldom attempted to smooth matters over. True, she was wilful and independent, but he acknowledged she had been fond of him, and perhaps he might have done more to retain her affection. To some extent he blamed Edwin for the estrangement between them, and this did not lessen his bitter feeling towards him now.

He had known Olive since she was a child, and watched her grow and develop into, what he thought, a beautiful woman. For the past ten years he had, when at Eagle Hurst, thought a good deal about the Vicar's daughter. At first he regarded it as mere ordinary interest in the growing up of a girl he had known for so many years, but gradually this opinion changed, and he hardly knew exactly how he regarded her.

As he walked through the wood he realised what had happened. An old postman's gossip had given him a hint as to the truth. The word "kiss" roused him as he had never been before, at all events for many years. It was the kiss in connection with Olive and Edwin decided it. He was highly indignant that his stepson had ventured so far. It made him angry when he thought of the many light kisses this young man had given and received from his gay friends in turn. It was desecration to soil Olive's lips or cheek after such proceedings. What did Edwin mean? Had he proposed to Olive and been accepted? She would not have allowed him to kiss her under any other circumstances. If this were so, then her father would know. She would tell him. She always told him everything. He would go to the Vicarage and find out all about it. The Vicar would be sure to confide in him, ask his advice. It had been given before; he would repeat it. Why should he concern himself in this affair? What business was it of his? For Olive's sake he ought to warn the Vicar. Was it for her sake alone? Had he no personal interest in it? He argued the question, and came to the conclusion personal feelings were at the root of the whole matter. Everything else was mere subterfuge. It was ridiculous, of course, pure selfishness. He was old enough to be her father. He had no right to think of her in that way. It was all very well to say this, but the fact remained that he wanted Olive, had wanted her for the past two years.

He laughed rather bitterly as he thought he was twice a widower, and she only one-and-twenty. It was asking a great deal from a young girl

80 The Little Wonder

to regard him in the light of a possible husband. She would probably laugh at the ridiculous idea, and quite-right too. Her father would be on his side, but he had no desire to use parental authority in gaining what he desired.

Edwin Swinton would not make Olive Havers happy, of that the Squire was convinced. Had it been any other girl he would have been of the same opinion. If he had not been attracted by Olive he would still have urged her father to forbid such a match. The knowledge that there might be something between them, however, roused him to action.

He felt rather ashamed of obtaining his information from such a source.

At the same time he exonerated Phil Godson from all intention of doing harm. He was aware that the postman, like all the villagers, regarded Olive with feelings akin to veneration, and that he would go out of his way to save her pain or sorrow. He came to the conclusion Godson had told him this in order to secure him as a champion for Olive against Edwin Swinton, who was very unpopular at Poolbank. Gradually his feeling against Godson subsided, and he felt glad the postman had given him the hint.

Skirting the wood he walked round in the direction of the Vicarage, with the intention of calling to see Mr. Havers, and if an opportunity offered of learning the news of his daughter and Edwin.

Looking up he was startled to see Olive coming towards him. She did not see him; there was time to slip into the wood and allow her to pass. For a moment he hesitated, and she decided for him. Olive saw him, and although she knew he was at Eagle Hurst, she gave a slight exclamation of surprise, her colour heightened, and when they met she looked confused—a most unusual thing with her.

“Old Godson told the truth,” thought the Squire as he looked at her.

CHAPTER XX

THE VICAR DECLINES

GREETINGS passed between them. She expressed her pleasure at seeing him again, said he had been away a long time, and they had all missed him.

“You think I am missed when I leave Eagle Hurst?” he asked.

“Indeed you are,” she answered quickly.

He found she was going on her usual visit to Eli, and turning back walked at her side. There was an awkward silence. Olive felt there was something in the air. What was it?

The Squire, as a rule, seldom lacked conversation, but in this instance he was at a loss for words.

He thought how fresh and pure Olive looked, so different from the town beauties whose charms were mostly artificial. It irritated him to think Edwin Swinton dared to kiss her; he wondered if she resented it. Godson said nothing about that.

"I was going to see your father," he said lamely.

"Then you had better not accompany me, I believe he is going out, and I am sure he would be sorry to miss you," she said.

Did she wish to be rid of him, he wondered! This was not far from the truth. Olive felt embarrassed, and was glad of an opportunity to be alone. The cottage was in sight when he left her. She thought he seemed displeased, and was sorry she had not been more sociable, for she liked him very much indeed, and he was a good friend. She watched him, but he did not look back, and with a little sigh she went on to Eli's.

Mr. Foyle walked rapidly to the Vicarage; by the time he arrived he had cooled down, felt more at his ease.

"Glad to see you again," said the Vicar, who hardly looked as though he intended going out.

"I met Olive. She said if I hurried I should catch you," said Mr. Foyle.

"I intended going out, but it is of no importance; I much prefer a chat with you."

Mr. Foyle hardly knew how to begin.

"Olive does not look so well," he said.

"Curious; I thought the same thing only this morning," said the Vicar.

"Has she been ailing?"

"No, she has made no complaints."

"It's no use beating about the bush," said the Squire impetuously.

"It's not her body, it is her mind that's troubled."

The Vicar looked at him in surprise.

"She has nothing to trouble her mind that I know of," he said.

"You remember what I told you about Edwin?" said Mr. Foyle.

"Yes; what of it?"

"He has been here frequently of late. Do you think he has seen much of Olive?"

"They have met several times."

"Do you think that is the cause of her uneasiness?"

The Vicar laughed as he said, "Oh no; they are friends, nothing more."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes; had there been anything more Olive would have told me."

"That's just it," said Mr. Foyle. "I think she is troubled because she is keeping something from you."

"Olive always tells me everything. I think you are mistaken, I am sure you are," said the Vicar.

"Havers, my friend, I have something to tell you—a secret; you will keep it to yourself," said the Squire.

"Yes," said the Vicar, wondering what was coming.

"It is a promise?"

"Yes."

"I hope you will not laugh at me, think me an old, conceited fool," said the Squire, "but I love Olive; I have loved her for two years or more, but I only realised it to-day."

Mr. Havers was astonished. He always hoped Olive would make a good match, but in his wildest dreams for her he had never thought of Squire Foyle as a possible wooer.

"I see you are amazed," said the Squire bitterly, "and no wonder; I am three times her age."

"My very dear friend and patron," said the Vicar, "it is not that at all, you mistake me. That I am astonished you can understand. The disparity in age is nothing—I do not regard it at all. That you love Olive is beyond my belief almost; it seems too good to be true. She is not like other girls; she would, I am sure, see nothing in the difference in ages. You love my girl—Olive—it is very strange."

"I don't see it," said the Squire. "Olive is a lovely woman, she is fit to adorn any station. I have watched her grow, and all the time was unaware of my real feelings towards her until something roused me to a sense of my position."

"May I ask what it was?"

"No, please do not; I cannot tell you. I felt when I came into the house I must tell you my secret; you will not give Olive any inkling as to the state of my feelings? She must not be influenced in any way. If she has made her choice I must abide it. I will not have her fettered. Excuse me, I am talking as though I had a right to have a voice in the matter," he said, smiling.

"And so you have," said the Vicar. "Our friendship has been of long standing, and we owe our happiness to you."

"Partly. You would have been happy elsewhere."

"Not nearly so happy as we are at Poolbank," said the Vicar. "Do you think Olive has any idea of this?"

"No, not the slightest. Why should she? It would seem ridiculous to her."

"Indeed, it would not," said the Vicar.

"Now you know how I feel towards her, you will understand how anxious I am about her. I know my stepson better than anyone. He is not the man to make Olive happy; he is not good enough for her. If he is here, constantly in her company, he may influence her. He has a fascinating way with the ladies, I believe; at least, such is his reputation. I hope you will not think ill of me for speaking against him. It seems selfish, but I assure you I mean all I say."

Mr. Havers smiled as he said, "I do not think you need be uneasy about Olive and Edwin Swinton; but I will question her about it."

"Not on my account, pray," said Mr. Foyle.

"On my own," said the Vicar.

"If you approve of it, may I ask Olive to be my wife?" said Mr. Foyle.

"It is an honour," said the Vicar. "I need hardly add you have my heartiest wishes of success. I wish you would allow me to help you."

"No," said the Squire. "I will not have her inclinations forced. If I succeed in winning Olive, I must do so myself without assistance from you."

When the Squire left, Mr. Havers was overjoyed; Olive the mistress of Eagle Hurst!—that was indeed good news. Her position as Mr. Foyle's wife would be one of the best in the county. He wondered why the Squire harped so on Edwin Swinton. He was convinced that he and Olive were merely friends, but he would inquire into the matter. There were means of paving the way for the Squire without breaking his promise.

It was later than usual when Olive returned, and she was surprised to find her father at home.

"I had a long chat with Mr. Foyle," he said, "and postponed my visit. You don't look very well, Olive," he said anxiously.

She laughed as she answered, "I never felt better."

"Mr. Foyle thought you did not look well."

Olive blushed. She remembered she had not appeared at her ease before the Squire, and that she was relieved when he left her.

"He takes a great interest in you," said her father.

"It is very good of him."

"So I think. He is our best friend. Olive, do you not agree with me?"

"Yes. But why do you ask?"

"Because sometimes one is apt to forget old friends when others occupy our minds."

Olive looked at him quickly. She was sure he was hinting at something. She felt angry with Edwin, because he had not spoken to him.

"No one will ever make me forget all we owe to Mr. Foyle," she said.

"Is Edwin at Eagle Hurst?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you have not seen him lately?"

"I saw him the last time he was here; we met in the park," said Olive.

"Of course you are old enough to choose your companions," said the Vicar; "but if I were you, Olive, I should not meet Edwin Swinton very often."

"Why, I like him!"

"He does not bear a very good name."

"I think he is misunderstood; he is always very polite to me."

"Naturally; he may have an object in view."

"Father!" she exclaimed.

"I mean he may wish to marry you."

Olive was silent. How she wished Edwin had told her father. It must come from him; why did he delay? She felt bitter against him. If she remained he might put awkward questions; she made an excuse, and left the room.

"She has done that to avoid me," he thought.

Olive had not long to wait. Edwin Swinton met her a few days after Mr. Foyle had been at the Vicarage. She was annoyed with him, and showed it. The reason, she explained, was that he had not spoken to her father, and it placed her in an awkward position. He was profuse in apologies, and said he would call at the Vicarage before he went to town.

"Your father is prejudiced against me," he said, "and I wished for a

favourable opportunity to ask him to give his consent to our engagement. The Squire is no friend to me, and no doubt he influences your father."

She denied this, she was quite sure Mr. Foyle did nothing of the kind.

Edwin Swinton was as good as his word. He called at the Vicarage, and asked Mr. Havers to give him permission to ask Olive to be his wife. The Vicar was not surprised; he thought better of Edwin for coming to him in a straightforward manner, but he refused his request.

"What objections have you against me?" asked Edwin.

"I do not wish Olive to marry you," said the Vicar. "I do not think you are suited to each other."

"But Olive loves me," said Edwin.

"Indeed! How did you find that out?"

"She has promised to be my wife if you will give your consent," said Edwin.

"So that's it," thought the Vicar. "Olive has a secret from me and it troubles her."

"I think you ought to have consulted me first," said the Vicar.

"My feelings got the better of me, and I asked her," said Edwin. "You must not blame Olive, it is not her fault."

"But she kept it from me."

"Because she wished me to speak to you first. She was angry at my not doing so before," said Edwin.

"I am sorry to refuse my consent," said the Vicar; "but I am quite sure I am right, and that it is for your mutual happiness."

"I cannot see it," said Edwin. "We love each other, and you ought not to stand in our way."

"I am sorry, Edwin," said the Vicar kindly.

"This is Mr. Foyle's doing," said Edwin, losing his temper.

"It is my own decision," said the Vicar. "Please leave Mr. Foyle's name out of the discussion."

"He is always interfering in my plans," said Edwin. "He has done so ever since I was a boy; he dislikes me, and it makes him unjust."

"I shall decline to discuss the question if you allude to Mr. Foyle," said the Vicar.

"Then you refuse your consent to my engagement with Olive?" said Edwin.

"Yes."

"If Olive's love is as great as mine, we may do without your consent," said Edwin.

"I think not," said the Vicar, with a confident smile.

CHAPTER XXI

PROSPECTS OF A ROW

AFTER his victory at Windsor, Dan had plenty of riding for the Dinnmore stable. The trainer was pleased with him, he knew Mr. Foyle had discovered a treasure. Harry Freelight was kind to Dan; he liked the lad and

encouraged him. The jockey was comfortably off, had saved money and intended in a year or two to give up riding ; he would probably have retired, before had not Mr. Foyle asked him to remain with them. Crisp noticed the jockey was troubled about something, but did not press for his confidence ; he wondered what was the cause of his depression, hoped in due course there would be an explanation.

Harry Freelight was uneasy about his sister. Her intimacy with Edwin Swinton increased ; she was frequently seen with him, and people talked ; their names were coupled, and comment made in the Press. He had spoken to his mother, asking her to use her influence with Lilian, but she thought Edwin Swinton would be a good match for her daughter, so declined to interfere.

"Then I must speak to her," said Harry, "I do not like Edwin Swinton, his character is none of the best."

"Young men with fortunes generally have onemies," said Mrs. Freelight.

Harry's interview with Lilian was not satisfactory. She liked Edwin, and declined to break with him.

"Has he asked you to marry him?" said Harry.

"No ; but that is my fault. I can easily induce him to do so," she said.

He looked surprised and pained.

"That is not like you, Lilian," he said reproachfully.

She was cross, and showed it. She knew her brother was very fond of her, and did not like offending him ; but, in an affair of this kind, she was the best judge ; he ought not to interfere.

Dan paid a visit to Poolbank. During the time he saw Phil Godson, and learned from him that Edwin Swinton was paying his addresses to Olive Havers. Eli corroborated this statement, and Dan reluctantly believed it. On his return to Newmarket he mentioned to Harry that he had been to Poolbank. The name of Edwin Swinton cropped up, and Dan said,—“I have heard he is to marry Miss Olive, the Vicar's daughter. I am sorry. She is far too good for him ; but she does not see many young men, and I suppose she thinks him everything a man ought to be”

Harry was amused at the lad's old-fashioned speech, at the same time angered against Edwin for playing with Lilian.

"You are sure it is true?" he said.

"I won't go so far as that," said Dan ; "but it's more than likely."

Sometimes Edwin Swinton came to Newmarket to see the horses at Dinmore House ; the Squire had no objections to this, although Crisp did not care about it.

A week or two after he had seen his sister, and heard Dan's news, Harry Freelight met Edwin on the Heath. They were both mounted on cobs, and were returning home after the morning's work.

Harry thought this a favourable opportunity to speak to him : if Lilian was deceived he had a right to do so.

After some casual remarks about the horses, Harry said—

"You are frequently out with my sister ; I believe you are friends, are you not?"

"Oh yes; I know her, and a lot more of the Frolic girls," said Edwin carelessly.

Harry resented his tone, and said—

"Your name has been coupled pretty freely with my sister's."

"Has it?" said Edwin, wondering what business it was of his.

"You know it has."

"Perhaps I do." He resented the jockey questioning him.

"I am very fond of my sister," said Harry; "she has many temptations put in her way; I mean to look after her."

Edwin laughed as he said --

"It's a waste of time, Lillian is quite capable of looking after herself."

"I am not so sure of that," said Harry.

"But I am; perhaps I see more of her than you."

"That is not improbable," said Harry. "If your intentions are honourable——"

"Of course they are," interrupted Edwin angrily.

"I am glad to hear it; but it is hardly fair to her to conceal your attachment to someone else," said Harry.

Edwin was astonished. Had he heard anything about Olive? If so it must have come from that little imp, Dan Hind; he'd give the lad a bit of his mind about it.

"I don't allow any one to meddle in my affairs," said Edwin.

"I mean to protect my sister, whether you like it or not," said Harry.

"Mind your own business," snapped Edwin.

"It is very much my business, as you will find out."

"What do you intend doing?" sneered Edwin. "You will find it a difficult matter to cause trouble between us."

"She shall be warned in time, anyway," said Harry.

"About what?"

"Your double dealing. I believe you are engaged to be married to a lady at Poolbank," said Harry.

Edwin was rather surprised at the thrust.

"You have been misinformed," he said.

"I do not think so."

"Supposing I am engaged, what has that to do with Lillian? You don't imagine I am going to marry her, do you?"

The jockey kept his temper. Edwin's words were insulting, and he resented them.

"I hope not," he answered quietly; "she is far too good for you."

"It would suit you better to keep your place; I have no desire to discuss my private affairs with the stable jockey," said Edwin.

"Take care, you may go too far," said Harry threateningly.

Edwin laughed as he said, "Take my advice and mind your own business; if you meddle in my affairs you will come off second best." He put his cob into a canter and left him before he had time to reply.

In the stable yard Edwin saw Dan and called him.

"Take this cob, you young devil," he said roughly.

Dan had a good opinion of himself; he was of some importance; he resented being ordered about in this fashion.

"Do you hear?" said Edwin.

Dan called one of the lads. "Take Mr. Swinton's cob," he said.

"I told you to take him," said Edwin.

Dan turned to walk away, when Edwin caught him by the collar and swung him round.

"What do you mean by this infernal cheek?" he said.

Dan wriggled, but could not get free.

Edwin shook him roughly.

"A thrashing would do you good," he said; "you are getting too big for your boots. There's something else I wish to say to you. You've been down to Poolbank lately?"

"What of that?" said Dan.

"And since you returned here you have been telling lies about me."

"No I haven't"

"I say you have. What did you tell Freelight?"

"Nothing much."

"Out with it," said Edwin.

"I said I heard you were engaged to Miss Olive, and that I was sorry for her."

"Oh, you did, oh! And you're sorry for her. Why?"

"Because I am," said Dan obstinately.

"That's no answer. I mean to have the truth."

"Leave go of my collar," said Dan.

"Not until you tell me everything. Why are you sorry for her?"

Dan refused to speak, and Edwin became exasperated; raising his whip, he said—

"Tell me, or I'll thrash you."

Crisp came on the scene, and heard the words.

"Any thrashing that's to be done you can leave to me," he said.

"Mind your own business," said Edwin rudely.

"Let that lad go," said Crisp.

"When I have done with him," said Edwin.

Crisp took Edwin by the arm and set Dan free.

"How dare you interfere with me!" said Edwin. "Mr. Foyle shall hear of this."

Crisp smiled as he said, "If I were you I would say nothing to Mr. Foyle. Tell me what the lad has done! how has he offended you?"

"He's been telling lies about me," said Edwin.

"I have always found him truthful; there must be some mistake."

"It's no concern of yours, anyway," said Edwin.

"It is very much my concern, when I find you threatening to thrash my best lad."

"I'm sorry for the stable if he's the best you've got."

"If you do not tell me how he has offended you, I cannot deal with him," said Crisp.

Harry Freolight heard from Dan what had taken place, and went across the yard to them.

"I think I can explain," said the jockey; "I have had a few words with Mr. Swinton: he is behaving badly to my sister, deceiving her, and also another lady."

"What has this to do with Dan?" asked the trainer.

Harry explained, and Crisp said—

"In that case I decline to call the lad over the coals. Will you have some breakfast, Mr. Swinton?"

"No," said Edwin.

"Then you must excuse me for leaving you; I have no time to waste," said the trainer. "You'll come in, Harry?"

"Yes, with pleasure," said the jockey, and they left Edwin alone.

"Nice young man that," said Crisp; "no wonder Mr. Foyle gives him a wide berth."

"I'll make it hot for him, if he doesn't leave my sister alone," said Harry.

"Tell her about the other young lady," said Crisp; "that ought to settle him."

"I intend doing so," said Harry. "I am going up to town this afternoon."

Dan discreetly kept out of the way, and Edwin Swinton left the yard without seeing him again.

Harry Freolight was waiting for his sister when she came out of the Frolic at night.

"You here, Harry!" she exclaimed. "I'm so sorry, but I'm going out to supper."

"May I come?"

"You can't; it's private."

"Who is going with you?"

"Mr. Swinton."

"Lilian, don't go," he said earnestly.

"What nonsense, Harry. I must."

"I've come straight from Newmarket to see you."

"Poor Harry; it's very good of you. We'll have a day out to-morrow."

"Then you mean going to this supper?"

"Yes; why not?"

"Do you know Swinton is engaged to be married?" he said.

"What!" exclaimed Lilian. "I don't believe it." She stamped her foot.

"It's true."

"I didn't think you'd say such things."

"He's engaged to Miss Havers, the vicar's daughter at Poolbank. He's playing with you and with her; he's a blackguard."

"If you are telling me an untruth I'll never forgive you."

"Ask him if he knows Miss Havers; if it is true."

"I will. We shall have a pleasant supper."

"You mean to go?"

"More than ever now."

"Do you like him, Lil?"

"Middling."

"Not very much?"

"It won't break my heart to part with him; but I'll make him sorry if he's deceived me."

"What will you do?"

"That depends upon circumstances. I shouldn't be surprised if I upset the supper-table."

"Where do you meet?"

"At Delgano's."

"Where is it?"

She gave him the address.

"I'll wait for you there," he said.

She hesitated, then said, as she held out her hand—

"I am sure you mean well, Harry, but I think you are mistaken. If you see me come out alone you'll know I have found him out."

"If he is with you?" he asked.

"Don't speak to me; come and see me in the morning," she said.

He saw her into a hansom, and told the driver to go to Delgano's.

CHAPTER XXII

DELGANO'S RESTAURANT

EDWIN SWINTON was impatiently waiting for Lilian at Delgano's. He was not in the best of tempers, the scene at Newmarket in the morning still annoyed him; he resented the conduct of both the trainer and jockey, and it irritated him to think it was of no use appealing to Mr. Foyle.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed as Lilian came in. "I have been waiting over half an hour."

"And don't you think it's worth it?" she asked. He thought it was, as he looked at her, but said something about ladies being always behind time.

"Grumpy," she said. "Where's our table?"

He led the way and she asked—

"Is Cecil here to-night?"

"No."

"We are quite alone?"

"Of course."

"I thought you might have asked him; you are bosom friends."

Something in her tone annoyed him, and he said—

"Have you only just made the discovery?"

She settled herself at the table, and the waiter brought the supper. It looked tempting, and she was hungry; Lilian always had a healthy appetite.

"I'll wait a bit until I have had something to eat," she thought, "then I'll fire a broadside."

"Champagne?" he asked.

"No, thanks; a small bottle of sparkling Moselle, please."

She commenced supper, and Edwin watched her moodily.

"Where's your appetite?" she asked.

"Left it at Newmarket," he said.

"You have been there?"

"I was on the Heath this morning; I met your brother."

"Nice boy, Harry," she said. He was playing into her hands; she anticipated some fun.

"He's an interfering puppy," snapped Edwin.

She put down her knife and fork, and pushed back her chair.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm going."

"Don't be silly. Sit down!"

"Only on conditions you apologise for calling Harry a puppy."

"Very well; he is not a puppy," said Edwin gruffly.

She sat down again and resumed her meal.

"What has Harry said or done to upset you?" she asked.

"It's all about you."

"Me!" she exclaimed.

"He objects to my being seen with you. Says I am not a fit and proper person to escort his sister about, and a lot of other beastly things."

"That's not like Harry. he must have a reason for it."

"I consider it was impertinent of him to interfere."

"You must excuse him, he is very fond of me."

"So am I," said Edwin.

"Really; you don't say so? Have some lobster?"

"No, thanks."

"Nice company, are you not?" she said.

"I'm a bit out of sorts."

"Where's Harry?" she asked.

"At Newmarket, I suppose; I left him there."

"Have you been to Poolbank lately?" she asked.

"About a week ago."

"You are often down there."

"My home is supposed to be at Eagle Hurst; that's only a mile or two away."

"Nice girls at Poolbank?" she asked.

"None to be compared to you," he answered.

"Not even Miss Havers?" said Lilian, watching him.

Edwin was surprised. What did she know about Olive?

"I know Miss Havers. She is the vicar's daughter," he said.

"Will you give me a straightforward answer to a question?"

"Yes."

"Are you engaged to Miss Havers?"

He did not answer immediately. Looking at her face he saw signs of a storm brewing; he thought if Lilian was like some of the Frolic girls there would be a row, and he had no wish for a scene.

"What a silly question to ask," he said.

"I don't think so; it is a very important one to me."

"Do you suppose I'd carry on with you if I were engaged to another girl?" he asked.

"That is exactly what I wish to find out."

He laughed uneasily as he said—

"I am not engaged to her. Will that satisfy you?"

"No."

"What more can I say?"

"Have you proposed to her?" she asked angrily.

"Keep your temper," he said.

"Answer me. I am not going to be made a fool of. I have been told you are engaged to be married."

"Who gave you that valuable information?" he asked.

"Never mind who gave it me, I believe it; and you've treated me shamefully." She raised her voice, and some people near looked at them.

"It is not true," he said; "for goodness' sake don't kick up a row here, Lilian."

"Don't call me Lilian. You are engaged to this girl."

"You'll upset the table if you wriggle about like that," he said.

"You deserve to have the supper emptied over you," said Lilian.

"Be calm; I assure you there is nothing in the report; allow me to explain."

"Go on," she said. "Let me hear all about it."

He told her he had known Olive Havers ever since he was a boy; that they were good friends and nothing more.

"I mean to find out the truth, even if I go to Poolbank and see her."

This did not suit Edwin Swinton. She was quite capable of doing so, and if she saw Olive there would be an end to his hopes in that quarter. He wanted Olive—whether he loved her or not was another matter—and her father's opposition to him, and the Squire's, made him determined to get her if possible; at the same time he had no wish to break with Lilian.

"If you go there, and see her, you will look ridiculous," he said.

"I don't care; I mean to have the truth."

"I have told you we are not engaged."

"But you're in love with her."

"I am too much attached to you," he said.

"Bosh!" said Lilian.

People were leaving the supper-room, and Lilian said, "I am going."

"May I accompany you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I prefer to be alone. You have deceived me ; I know it, and I do not wish to speak to you again," she said.

"What nonsense ; we have been very good friends. What does it matter if I have had a little flirtation at Poolbank ? There's no harm done."

"You have been making a fool of me," said Lilian angrily ; "and I believe her brother has been helping you."

He offered to put on her cloak, but she handed it to the waiter, who smiled quietly.

"She's found out about some of his other girls," thought the man.

"Lilian !" he called, as she was about to go.

"Well, what is it ?"

"See me to-morrow ; I am sure I can convince you you are wrong," he said. She shook her head.

"Do you really intend going to Poolbank ?" he asked.

"Perhaps you think I am afraid to go ?"

"It won't do any good to kick up a row with her," he said.

She stepped up to him, looked at him with contempt, and said—

"I shall not 'kick up a row with her.' I wish her joy of you, I am sure I do not envy her. Send me a wedding card when the affair comes off. I am ashamed of myself for making a friend of you."

She walked quickly out, leaving him alone, and he flushed angrily as he saw a merry party at the opposite side of the room laughing at his discomfort.

Harry Freehight saw his sister come out, and his face brightened. He joined her, and they walked down the street together ; then he hailed a hansom and drove home.

Mrs Freehight was in bed, and they sat talking together for some time.

"I am glad you told me, Harry," she said. "I am sure it is true. I could see it in his face. I have done with him. I gave him a fright when I threatened to go to Poolbank and see her."

"You did not mean it, of course ?" he said.

"At the moment I did, I was angry, but not now. I am sorry for her ; she ought to be warned. I dare say she is a nice, innocent girl, and he is a blackguard to deceive her," said Lilian.

"Perhaps she will find him out," he said.

"I hope so," answered Lilian.

When Edwin Swinton arrived at his flat he was in a very bad temper.

He had no idea he was so fond of Lilian ; he must see her again and smooth matters over. Was it worth while trying to get Olive ? He decided it was, if only to spite the Vicar and Mr. Foyle.

A surprise awaited him when he entered his room. Cecil Havers sat there looking the picture of misery, and had evidently been taking more wine than was good for him.

"What are you doing here ?" asked Edwin, not very well pleased.

"I'm in a fix ; I want you to help me," said Cecil in a thick voice.

"Where have you been ?"

Cecil named the place, and said he had lost fifty pounds.

"Then you're a fool," said Edwin angrily. "You promised me you would give up cards after that last affair."

"I took too much wine," said Cecil, "and they urged me on. I know I'm a fool; but you'll help me this time, old fellow, won't you?"

"Do you know how much you owe me?"

"A hundred or two."

"Nearer four hundred," said Edwin.

"Not as much as that, is it?"

"Yes, you have been going the pace. I'll give you the fifty if you'll do something for me."

"What is it? I'll do it," said Cecil.

"Ask Olive to come up to town to see you?"

"What for?"

"I want to persuade her to marry me."

"She'll not do it; you don't know Olive."

"I think she will," said Edwin, "at any rate, ask her to come to town; she's been once or twice to see you."

"Very well, I'll ask her; but she is sure to refuse to marry without the governor's consent," said Cecil.

"I've had a row with Lilian," said Edwin.

"You don't say so. What about?"

"She's heard I'm engaged to your sister, and we have had a scene."

"How did she hear it?"

"That little scamp Dan told Harry Freelight."

"All off with Lilian?" asked Cecil.

"I'm afraid so."

"So much the better if you want Olive."

"Of course I want her."

"Can you give me the money to-night?"

Edwin drew a cheque for the amount and handed it to him.

"If Olive comes to town," said Cecil, "where will you meet her?"

"Here."

"In your flat?"

"Yes. Why not? Where's the harm?"

"Oh, no harm at all that I know of, but I don't think she'll like it."

"Ask her."

"She'll come if I am with her," said Cecil.

"Then bring her; I shall be glad to see you both," said Edwin.

CHAPTER XXIII

LILIAN MEETS OLIVE

OLIVE accepted her brother's invitation to London. He met her at the station, and was glad to see her.

"Had you any particular reason for sending for me?" she asked, thinking he looked far from well.

"No ; only I have been a bit off colour lately, and I thought you would cheer me up. You don't mind !"

"I am very glad I am here. You must have a change. I wish you were transferred to Poolbank," she said.

He had promised to take her to Edwin Swinton's between four and five, and wondered how he was to arrange it.

Gradually he led up to the subject, but thought she seemed distressed when he mentioned Edwin. He inquired the cause, and she told him their father resolutely set his face against any engagement between them.

"Are you very fond of him ?" asked her brother.

"Yes," she replied ; "and I cannot understand why father is so prejudiced."

"Edwin is very anxious to see you, Olive. I promised to take you to his flat this afternoon. You will go, will you not ?" he asked anxiously.

"I cannot go to his flat," she said.

"But I shall be with you."

"It would not be right."

"Not to go alone, but with me it is different. Besides, I promised him."

Olive hesitated. She wished to meet Edwin, but hardly liked going to his flat. Still, with her brother there would be no impropriety in it. Her father's opposition had the effect of increasing her regard for Edwin. She thought he was not treated fairly, and she resented any injustice.

Eventually, much to Cecil's relief, she decided to go, and at four o'clock they drove to Westminster.

Edwin Swinton eagerly awaited their arrival. He had planned how to get rid of Cecil for an hour so that he could speak to Olive alone.

A motor brougham went past just as Cecil and his sister entered the mansions. Lillian Freelight was the occupant and recognised him. Then she thought, "Perhaps that is his sister ; I'd like to find out."

The motor went on, and she checked the impulse to order the chauffeur to turn round and pull up at the mansions.

It was with some trepidation Olive entered Edwin Swinton's rooms. She fancied the man who opened the door had an inquisitive smile, and resented it as an impertinence.

Edwin welcomed her affectionately, quickly placing her at her ease.

They had tea, and soon afterwards he said to Cecil, "I wish you would run round to the Haymarket. I sent for tickets for to-night, but they have not come. You would like to go, Olive ?"

"Very much indeed," she replied.

"You don't mind seeing about them ?" he said to Cecil.

As her brother rose to go it occurred to Olive she would be alone with Edwin. She was in a difficulty if she protested against his going. Edwin would naturally think she mistrusted him. It was exceedingly awkward before she had time to make up her mind how to act Cecil said—

"I shall not be away more than half an hour. Edwin will take care of you." He left the room before she had time to answer.

Edwin noticed her troubled look and said, "I wanted a few words with you alone, Olive."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Your father is still obstinate. I see no chance of gaining his consent; we love each other, cannot we do without it? Marry me, Olive; I am sure he would forgive us afterwards."

"Oh no, I cannot do that," she said much agitated. "You must not ask me; it is not kind."

He came nearer to her, and said as he bent over her, "You do love me, Olive; say you do?"

She looked at him in a half-frightened way, but made no answer.

"Olive, trust me and marry me," he said

"I cannot, Edwin; it would not be right."

His blood was up; how lovely she was! The temptation was great, and he was sure she loved him. He took her in his arms and kissed her; she struggled faintly, but he did not let her go.

She wished Cecil was here; it was wrong of him to leave her.

Edwin kissed her again, and this time she said—

"Please let me go. You have no right to do this."

Reluctantly he released her, and she stepped away from him. She looked confused, her face was hot, and Edwin was anything but calm.

At this moment sounds of voices outside reached them.

"I wish to see Mr. Swinton; I will see him."

There was no mistaking the tones; it was Lilian, and Edwin flew to the door to lock it.

He was too late; before he had time to turn the key, the door was flung open and Lilian entered.

"How are you, Edwin?" she said. "Your man said you were engaged, but I gave him to understand you were never so much engaged that you could not see me."

She had seen Olive as she entered the room, but pretended to notice her now for the first time.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I see you have a lady here. I'm sorry I interrupted you; I'll go."

Edwin heartily wished she would, also that she was at the uttermost ends of the earth—anywhere but in his room at this particular time. Olive knew she ought to speak. She came forward quietly, and with such ladylike grace that Lilian was disarmed.

"Please do not go," she said. "I came here with my brother to see Mr. Swinton; we are old friends."

"Introduce me," said Lilian, and Edwin did so, awkwardly.

He felt a savage inclination to take Lilian by the shoulders and push her out of the room.

"So you are Cecil's sister," said Lilian not unkindly. She felt sorry for her, and in her impulsive, generous way at once liked her.

"You know my brother?"

"Oh, yes; very well."

Olive could not quite make her out; she recognised Lilian was not in her sphere, but there was something attractive, irresistible about her.

"And you are a friend of Mr. Swinton's?"

Lilian laughed dangerously, and Edwin shivered, wondering how the scene would develop. Lilian had an eye for effects. Olive looked puzzled. What did that laugh mean?

"Mr. Swinton and I had a quarrel the other night, and I have come to patch it up."

"I am very glad," said Olive.

"As you are such an old friend of his, I may as well tell you all about it."

"It cannot possibly interest Miss Havers," said Edwin, glaring angrily at her.

"I think it will; it concerns us all."

Olive wondered how it could possibly have anything to do with her.

Lilian was thirsting for revenge; she had been played with and resented it; moreover, as she looked at Olive, she thought—

"It is not her fault, she knows nothing about it; I'll put a spoke in his wheel, and she'll thank me for it afterwards."

"We quarrelled about you," said Lilian bluntly.

"About me!" exclaimed Olive.

"Yes, in Delgano's restaurant, of all places in the world," said Lilian, thinking she would let him have it hot.

Edwin wished himself well out of it, but saw no chance of escape. It would only make matters worse by trying to stop her, she was bent on making the most of her opportunity.

"He's been playing the traitor," said Lilian. "Had you any idea he was paying attentions to me?"

Olive looked reproachfully at Edwin, who writhed under her glance.

"No; I see you hadn't. He's been very energetic in pursuing me. I'm one of the Frolic girls, and young men like him think it fine sport to lead us on. They're selfish brutes, that's what they are," said Lilian.

Olive wished Cecil would return and end this painful scene; then she thought—

"She knows Cecil; I wonder if he was aware of this? He must have been; it is shameful."

Her anger rose against Edwin and her brother; she classed them as fellow-conspirators. She felt no resentment against Lilian; on the contrary, she sympathised with her.

Lilian poured out her story; Olive listened, and her heart hardened. She had never loved Edwin, she knew it now.

Edwin Swinton tried to make excuses; he contradicted Lilian, but all to no purpose. He was trying to defend himself when Cecil Havers returned.

"You here, Lilian!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes, I've just looked in."

"Are you ready, Olive?" asked Cecil, wishing to make his escape. He thought it was all up with Edwin, and wondered how it would affect himself.

"I wish to ask you a question," she said.

"What is it?"

"Did you know Mr. Swinton was paying attentions to Miss Freelight?"

"I knew they were friends."

Lilian laughed as she said, "Oh, yes; you knew all about it. A nice brother you are—a pretty pair you look."

The tears stood in Olive's eyes; after all she had done for Cecil, to find he had deceived her was too bad.

Lilian saw she was in trouble, and said—

"Don't blame your brother too much, I think he's been led away by Mr. Swinton."

Olive knew better. Her faith in men had been rudely shattered this afternoon; her father and the Squire were right, Edwin Swinton was not to be depended upon.

"I am going," said Olive quietly, as she went towards the door.

"Olive," said Edwin pleadingly.

"I am glad I found you out before it was too late," she said, without a tremor in her voice.

"I will go with you," said Cecil.

"No," said Olive, "I will go alone."

Lilian watched the scene with keen appreciation. She admired Olive's self-control, the position was trying. Edwin and Cecil were in such a state of confusion and utter annihilation that she laughed.

"Will you go with me?" said Lilian to Olive, "my motor is at the door. I shall be very pleased if you will."

"Yes," said Olive. "Thank you very much. Can you drive me to St. Pancras?"

"Yes; are you going home?"

"I am, I think I shall never come up to London again," said Olive.

Lilian smiled as she said, "I am sure you will, and enjoy yourself, too."

Edwin and Cecil stood awkwardly in the room, looking exceedingly foolish. Lilian was triumphant. She turned round as she followed Olive out, and as a parting shot said—

"Good-bye, dear boys; take care of yourselves; a nice sociable pair you will be when we are gone."

Her merry laughter as she shut the door made their ears tingle.

CHAPTER XXIV

TWO PEOPLE SURPRISED

"A NICE mess you have made of things," said Cecil, who wished to put Edwin in the wrong as a preliminary step.

"How on earth was I to know Lilian would turn up, confound her?" snarled Edwin. "She's a mischievous minx, and I'll pay her out."

"Olive seemed to take it coolly. You can't have made much of an impression," said Cecil.

"I rather fancy you have dropped in her estimation," said Edwin.

"Of course, you'll give her up?"

"Olive?"

"Yes."

"I'll think it over. She may give me another chance."

"Take my advice and forget her. I know Olive," said Cecil.

"How lovely she looked," said Edwin. "I'd like to do Lilian a bad turn for this nasty trick."

Cecil thought perhaps he might have a chance with Lilian now.

"What about these tickets?" he asked.

"We'll use them, and make a night of it."

"I'm willing, but the bank's low," said Cecil.

"You can't expect me to keep on replenishing it," said Edwin.

"Of course not, but you'll give me plenty of time to pay off what I owe?"

"Oh, yes; don't trouble about that," said Edwin. "It's not your fault this has happened."

Olive's ride with Lilian proved instructive. She learned a good deal about Edwin Swinton, and not much to his credit.

"So you are an actress?" said Olive. "I never met one before."

"Am I very terrible?" laughed Lilian.

"No; not at all. I think you are very nice. Do you like my brother?"

"Pretty well," said Lilian. "He has more principle than the other one."

"I should like to meet you again," said Olive, as she bid her good-bye out of the carriage window.

"Let me know when you are in town, and I will meet you," said Lilian.

"Oh, I forgot, you said you could not come to London again."

Olive smiled as she answered quietly, "I think I shall."

When she arrived home her father was surprised to see her. He had not expected her to return so soon.

"Quite a short visit," he said; "hardly worth going to town for. How is Cecil?"

Two People Surprised

'99

"He does not look well, father," she said earnestly. "He ought to leave London."

"Why?" he asked, surprised.

"Because he is being led away. I am sure he spends too much money."

"He did not tell you that?"

"Oh no; I found it out; at least, I think so."

Mr. Havers looked distressed. He wondered if Edwin Swinton was responsible.

Olive hesitated for some time. Then she said—

"You were right about Edwin Swinton; he is not to be trusted. I have found him out." Then she told about Lillian.

This consoled Mr. Havers for his anxiety about Cecil.

"Do you think Edwin is a good companion for Cecil?" he asked.

"No; I am sure he is not."

"I must try and have him removed to Poolbank; I think Mr. Foyle might arrange it," said Mr. Havers.

"We are already greatly indebted to him," she said.

"He is only too glad to assist us in any way. I am going to see him, I will mention it."

The Squire was glad to see Mr. Havers, he saw he had something to communicate.

"I hardly like to mention it," said the Vicar, "but you have been so kind that I venture to trespass further." Then he spoke about Cecil, omitting Edwin Swinton's name, saying he desired the change on account of his son's health.

"Is that all?" replied the Squire, smiling; "I think I can arrange it. I bank at the General Counties."

"There is something else," said the Vicar.

About Olive? asked the Squire eagerly.

"Yes."

"Is there any hope for me?"

"I trust so; at any rate, the coast is clear now. She has found Edwin out," and he proceeded to explain what happened in London.

"I am very glad," said the Squire. "I know this young lady; she is my jockey's sister."

"Olive says she is a very nice girl."

"Exceedingly good-looking," said the Squire.

"She did Olive a very good turn."

"Probably an act of revenge for Edwin's conduct."

"That influenced her, no doubt; but Olive says she is sure she is generous and warm-hearted," said the Vicar.

"Probably; at the same time she is hardly a suitable companion for Olive."

"We must not be prejudiced because she is on the stage," said the Vicar, smiling.

"I am not. I know many actors and like them; but the Frolic is rather a lively place."

"Is it? I have never been there," said the Vicar

The Squire laughed as he said, "I have, and enjoyed myself immensely."

Olive was hurt at Edwin Swinton's conduct, but felt relieved that she had found him out.

"I never loved him," she thought, "or it would have distressed me. Cecil's conduct I cannot forget, and after all I have done for him too."

Mr. Foyle determined not to allow any time to elapse before he asked Olive to be his wife. He called at the vicarage and found her alone; the opportunity was favourable, and he took advantage of it.

Olive had no idea of what was coming. She liked him better than any man she had met, next to her father; she trusted him more than any one.

"I will try and get your brother transferred to Poolbank," he said. "I wonder if he will thank me for it, he will find it a change from London."

"How good of you," she said; "but you are always kind."

"I am glad you think so; it encourages me," he said.

He was looking at her earnestly, and she felt a curious thrill of excitement. Something strange was about to happen, she was sure of it

He did not keep her in suspense; he spoke eloquently from his heart, telling her how he loved her, asking her to be his wife. He alluded to his age, and hoped she would try and forget the years that were between them.

"I feel it is selfish on my part to ask you to be my wife, Olive," he said. "You are young, and there are many men of your own age who would marry you; but I can say this that no man will ever love you more than I do. For two years at least I have known how dear you are to me, but I have not dared to speak before."

He pleaded earnestly and she was much affected. She had never regarded him in this light, it was new and strange to her, she hardly understood it, the full significance of his words were not realised. He asked her to be his wife, and gradually she comprehended all it meant. He was rich, held in honour, the first gentleman in the county, so her father always said; the owner of Eagle Hurst with all its wondrous natural beauties, the lord of the soil for many miles round, the squire, the one man she had always been taught to look up to and regard as her father's benefactor.

It did not seem strange that he should ask her to give herself to him, but it was very wonderful. He said he loved her, and she never doubted; that was most remarkable of all. What was there in a mere girl, like herself, to attract him? She thought of all the beautiful, high-born ladies he knew, of the society in which he moved, and he had singled her out, the vicar's daughter, for this signal honour. It overwhelmed her, made her tremble; it was a responsibility she dared not undertake.

Something told her she almost loved him, if not quite, that she would be

perfectly happy and contented with him, that her future would be bright and brilliant. She never gave a thought to the difference in their ages; he looked so splendid, such a man, a courteous gentleman worthy of any woman, no matter how high her rank. How handsome he was, erect, with a noble face, and possessing a chivalrous nature. For a moment she remembered he had been twice married; then there was a pause, she recalled Edwin's mother, and her heart warmed towards him.

Marry him, Squire Foyle, it was indeed marvellous, it sounded like a wonderful dream!

"Olive, what have you to say to me?"

His question roused her. She must give him an answer, it was wrong of her to delay. What must the answer be?

He was very anxious, how much depended upon her reply. He commenced to hope, he knew his offer must have startled her. He came nearer to her and took her hands, raising her from her chair. He was tall, and looked down into her face. She met his eyes without faltering; there was a light in them that made his heart beat.

Had she regarded him as a kind friend merely, a very old friend, the light would have been different; it was not the way she would have looked at her father.

He took her in his arms, then raised her head and kissed her.

"Is it yes, Olive?" he asked gently, and her low answer assured him he had won the prize. Then she explained, protested that she was overwhelmed, that she was not fit to be the mistress of Eagle Hurst, and take her place in the county as his wife. She was a mere girl, had no experience; would he be satisfied with her?

He laughed joyously as he said—

"More than satisfied, Olive, I am the happiest man alive. I can hardly think it is true. What a fortunate being I am!"

When the Vicar came in he was still there. He saw what had happened, and his heart was lifted up in thankfulness that so great a blessing had been bestowed upon his child.

"She has consented, my friend, I can hardly believe it, but it is true," said the Squire.

Olive kissed her father, and as her feelings overcame her, she quickly left the room.

"Give me your hand," said the Squire.

The Vicar did so, and Mr. Foyle pressed it hard.

"You are satisfied?" he asked.

"I cannot express my gratitude; Olive's happiness is assured. Again I am your debtor; my friend, where and when will your generosity to me and mine end?" said the Vicar.

"Don't call me generous when you have given me such a priceless gift; never allude to anything I have done again. There is a great balance on your side; I can never repay you," said the Squire.

Some few days later Edwin Swinton glanced down the personal column in his morning paper, when he saw the following announcement which caused him to gasp in amazement :—

“A marriage has been arranged, and will take place in the spring, between Henry Colbert Foyle, Esqr., of Eagle Hurst, and Olive Havers, daughter of the Rev. Cecil Havers, vicar of Poolbank.”

It was some time before Edwin recovered from the shock.

“He’s sixty if he’s a day,” he said to himself. “She can’t love him. They’ve forced her into it. It’s a beastly shame. She’ll soon find out she’s made a mistake. He drove my mother wild ; she often told me so, and he’ll drive Olive the same way. There may be a chance for me yet. If ever the opportunity comes I’ll pay him out for this nasty turn. It’s my belief he wanted her all along, and poisoned her mind against me in order to gain his ends.”

CHAPTER XXV

DAN MEANS TO WIN

SQUIRE FOYLE and Olive Havers were married in the spring, and after a month of travel returned to Eagle Hurst. Olive quickly adapted herself to her new surroundings, although they could hardly be so described, as she had been familiar with them for a long time. The marriage came as a surprise. Olive was considered very fortunate, but most people thought she had accepted the Squire for his money and the position he gave her, and that love had very little to do with it. They were mistaken. Olive loved her husband ; she found that out in a very short time.

When Mr. Foyle suggested they should occupy his town house for the London season, Olive said she would much prefer to remain at Eagle Hurst, and he quickly fell in with her views.

“And you must not consider me in any way,” she said. “I mean you must not neglect your favourite amusement for my sake, I shall be quite happy here when you are away, although I shall be very glad to see you again.”

“You allude to racing ; I own I am fond of it,” he said. “You would not care for some of the meetings, but there are several I am sure you would like to attend.”

“I prefer to be quiet for the first year, at any rate,” she said. “I have always taken a great interest in village life at Poolbank, and, thanks to your generosity, I shall be able to do more in the way of helping deserving people than has hitherto been the case.”

He had settled an ample fortune on her, although she protested, as also did her father, and she had a command of money that was new and pleasantly strange to her.

There was one subject Mr. Foyle had not yet touched upon, and that was the question of Edwin Swinton's rooms in the house. It was impossible he should continue to occupy them under the altered circumstances, and yet Mr. Foyle hesitated about informing him that it was no longer desirable for him to do so.

He had given Edwin's mother a sort of promise that her son should make Eagle Hurst his home if he wished. If this could not be carried out any longer, he intended to find his stepson a bachelor's residence near Poolbank. He mentioned the matter to Olive in a delicate way that touched her deeply. She had no desire to oust Edwin from Eagle Hurst, but she felt it would be exceedingly awkward for him to retain the rooms on the same footing as hitherto. She had told her husband of everything that had passed between her and Edwin, even to his kisses, and Mr. Foyle had been most kind and considerate over it.

"We can, I think, keep the rooms for him; he may occupy them when he is invited here," she said. "I do not suppose he will be a frequent visitor."

Mr. Foyle had his doubts about this.

"I see no objection to that," he said; "but I shall give him to understand that he cannot have the run of the house. I will let him have Foxglove, it is a comfortable place, and I will furnish it for him. He can take what he wishes from his rooms here."

Olive agreed with him, and Mr. Foyle said he would see Edwin the next time he was in London.

This he did. He made an appointment and called at Edwin's rooms. There was some embarrassment between them, but it gradually wore off. It was the first time they had met since the marriage.

Mr. Foyle explained what he proposed doing, and Edwin raised no objections. Foxglove was a nice little place, he said, and it was very good of Mr. Foyle to hand it over to him.

"Of course, we shall always be pleased to see you at Eagle Hurst," said Mr. Foyle. "I suppose you were rather surprised to hear of our engagement?" he said with a smile.

"I was," replied Edwin. "It is all over now, but I naturally felt sore about it at the time."

"You did not go the right way about it if you wished to win Olive," said the Squire.

Edwin thought the less said on this subject the better, but he determined to see as much of Mrs. Foyle as possible; he was confident she had married his stepfather merely to gain a position in the county.

"Are you going to run Black Legs at Ascot?" he asked, to change the subject.

"Yes; in the Prince of Wales's Stakes and the St. James's Palace Stakes."

"Who will ride him?"

"Dan Hind."

"What does Freelight say to it?" asked Edwin.

"He strongly advises me to put Dan up on Black Legs. Are you going to Ascot?"

"Yes"

"Then I shall probably see you there."

"Is Mrs. Foyle going?"

"No, she does not care much about racing," said the Squire.

"He means to go his own way and let her go hers," thought Edwin.

Mr. Foyle tried to persuade Olive to go to Ascot, but when he saw she much preferred to remain at Eagle Hurst he made no further effort. She had a very good reason for doing so, although she did not tell him.

At Newmarket, Crisp was busy giving the finishing touches to his Ascot team. Black Legs had grown into a fine three-year-old, and the trainer had great hopes of pulling off the two rich prizes with him. Dan rode the horse at work, and although at times the colt showed temper, he was evidently on good terms with his jockey. Dan had not yet ridden at Ascot, and was looking forward to it with pleasure. He kept up a correspondence with Josiah and Nancy, and the owner of the *Merry Belle* astonished his wife one morning by proposing to lay the barge up for repainting and sundry repairs.

"But she doesn't require it, Josh," said Nancy, "She's spick and span, not a fault to find with her."

"All the same, a new coat of paint won't hurt her; it would brighten her up a bit—with orange and purple on her."

"Sakes alive, man! Orange and purple! what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Nancy.

"A couple o' lines round her; them colours would look well."

"Too gaudy," said Nancy. "What made you pick on them?"

"They're the Squire's racing colours. Dan wears 'em."

"Oh!" said Nancy, smiling

"Shall we have 'em?"

"If you like, you always had good taste," said Nancy.

He chuckled at her quick change of opinion when he mentioned Dan.

"And while the boat's laid up, Nance, we might take a bit of a holiday," he suggested.

"You'll have her done up at Poolbank?" said Nancy.

"Yes; old Abe paints well yet."

"Then we can spend our time there; it won't cost much," said Nancy.

This was not Josiah's view at all, he had other ideas.

"It won't be much of a change to stay mooning about Poolbank," he said.

"We've friends there."

"Old Eli, and one or two more," said Josiah. "I'm about full of 'em."

"For shame!" said Nancy. "I'm surprised at you."

"Eli's a bit overpowering at times," said Josiah.

"He means well."

"Oh, yes; I don't doubt that," said Josiah. "All the same, we'd better have a change."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Well, I thought of an outing that would suit us both; it would be grand, lot o' sport, and maybe a bit o' money hanging to it," he said.

"And where's this wonderful place?" asked Nancy.

"Ascot," said Josiah.

"Never heard of it," said Nancy.

Josiah laughed, he was not surprised

"Ascot's a big heath where they run races on," explained Josiah.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nancy "But what do folks like us want at races?"

"Dan'll be there," said Josiah

"Will he, now?" said Nancy.

"I've heard from him," said Josiah cautiously.

"And you never let me read the letter; hand it over this instant," said Nancy, holding out her hand

Josiah produced the letter from his pocket and gave it to her. Nancy read it eagerly. Dan proposed that Josiah and Nancy should come to Ascot. Crisp, the trainer, had taken a small cottage for the lads. Dan had proposed that Josiah and Nancy should look after them for the week. Nancy could do the cooking, and Josiah could keep an eye on things. The trainer, amused, had fallen in with the suggestion when he learned who Mr. and Mrs. Fudge were. Dan wanted to know at once if they would do it.

"Tell Nancy she'll see me ride Black Legs and win on him, if she comes," he wrote.

"Well, I never!" said Nancy; "how the boy do scribble to be sure."

"What do you say to it?" asked Josiah.

"It would be a rare change," said Nancy.

"And cost us nothing," said Josiah.

"I'm none so sure about that; you may get betting."

"Dan says he'll win," said Josiah.

"And I suppose he knows?"

"Sure and certain."

"We'll go," said Nancy.

Josiah executed a caper in the cabin, then hugged his wife furiously, until she cried to him to leave off his foolery, or he'd squeeze the breath out of her.

"You write to him," said Josiah, when he had cooled down. "You're a better hand with the pen than me."

"He'd like you to do it," she said. "Better try."

Josiah consented, and toiled at his unaccustomed task the whole of one afternoon. The letter finished, he contemplated it with satisfaction. He explained to Dan that he was of no use in a cottage, but that Nancy had undertaken "to do for them," and he knew what that meant.

Nancy read the letter and expressed satisfaction with it

"I couldn't have done it half as well," she said.

Josiah slipped a bit of paper in on his own account later on.

"I'm going to have a few pounds on Black Legs," he wrote "If he wins it will be grand; if he loses, for goodness' sake don't tell Nancy."

When Dan received this letter he showed it to Crisp, who was amused, especially at the slip Josiah had put in.

"Nancy rules over the cash-box, is that it?" he asked.

"A bit that way," said Dan, "and a good job for Josiah it is so."

"Well, I'm glad they're going to take charge of you lads, it's a relief to me. I mentioned it to Mr. Foyle, and he said I could not get more reliable people."

"He's right," said Dan.

"So he's going to have a few pounds on Black Legs, eh?" said Crisp.

"Seems like it," said Dan.

"He'll win, I think; don't you?"

"Both races," said Dan confidently. "He's never gone so well as he's galloping now."

"It will be something to be proud of if a youngster like you wins two big three-year-old events at Ascot, against the best horses and the crack jockeys," said the trainer.

"I mean to win," said Dan, and looked so perfectly satisfied with himself that Crisp laughed heartily.

CHAPTER XXVI

"WHIPS OFTEN LOSE RACES"

THE *Merry Belle* was laid up at Poolbank, and Josiah and Nancy went to Ascot. The cottage the trainer had taken was near the Heath; Nancy expressed her approval of it, and Josiah looked forward to a gay time.

"How you're to keep an eye on things, if you're on the Heath every day, beats me," said Nancy.

"You'll have to come, too, when Dan rides Black Legs," he said.

"And leave the place to take care of itself?—not likely," said Nancy.

"Lock it up; there ain't much worth stealing."

"What will Mr. Crisp say?"

"I'll make it right with him; leave that to me," said Josiah.

"So long as Mr. Crisp agrees, I don't mind," said Nancy; "I'd like to see Dan ride."

"And win," chimed in Josiah.

"Of course; he says he'll win," answered Nancy.

The lads arrived on Monday; and Nancy had everything nice and snug.

Joe Saint, the head lad, said Nancy was a fine set-up woman; he had not been long in the house before he told her that Josiah was a lucky man to possess her, and he wished he was in his shoes.

Joe was a small man and Nancy laughed as she compared him with her husband.

“You’d best not let Josh hear you talk like that,” she said.

“Why? he ought to be proud that folks envy him.”

“He’s over six feet, and strong as a lion.”

“Is he now? I’m a bit of a fighter myself, I’m small, but I’m fierce.”

“Are you, indeed?” said Nancy. “You look mild enough; but it’s surprising what a heap of courage some little men have.”

“You like big men?” he asked.

“It’s this way,” she said, “I’m used to a big man; now, if I’d met you before Josh, there’s no telling which way my fancy might have turned.”

“Just my luck to be out of it when there was a chance of meeting you,” said Joe.

“Here’s Josh coming,” said Nancy.

Joe looked out at the window, when he saw Josiah’s mighty form coming, and he said—

“I’m off, Mrs. Fudge, he’s a giant. You’ll not tell him I am your devoted slave?”

“Oh, dear, no,” laughed Nancy, “I’ll be merciful, and spare you.”

Crisp looked in later on, and thought the boys were lucky to be so well cared for.

“You can lock up the place to-morrow and Thursday,” he said; “then you will have a chance of seeing Dan ride.”

It was a great change for Josiah and his wife when they went on the Heath on the opening day.

“Never saw so many folks in my life,” said Josiah.

“Wherever have they all come from?” she exclaimed. “There’s Jarvis; who’d have thought of seeing him here?”

Jarvis was the storekeeper at Poolbank from whom Josiah had purchased the whip for Dan. They spoke to him; and for the remainder of the day kept together.

The Prince of Wales’s Stakes was the fourth race, and Josiah resisted all temptations to bet until Dan appeared on Black Legs.

They were on the rails, and when he caught sight of the orange jacket and purple cap he shouted—

“Here’s Dan! Look, Nance; isn’t he a tiny mite on that big horse? It’s a wonder how he sticks on.”

A man standing near heard him, and said—

“Do you know the Little Wonder?”

“You mean Dan Hind?”

“Yes, that’s what they call him, and he’s a wonder, and no mistake; I never saw a better lad for his size, and I’ve seen hundreds.”

“He’s almost like our own boy,” said Nancy.

“Then you’ll know what he thinks about Black Legs’ chance?”

“He’ll win,” said Josiah. “Where can I put a bit on?”

"Any of these men are good for a few pounds," said the man. Go to some fellow with a big sign up; there's plenty of them."

"What will you do?" he asked Jarvis.

"Stay with Mrs. Fudge, if you'll put me ten shillings on," said Jarvis.

"All right was Josiah's reply; "and look after her well."

"I'll be proud to do so"

Josiah struggled through the crowd and made for the shouting bookmakers.

He saw the lists up, with the names of eight horses on, and the prices against each. From time to time the figures were altered.

"Why do they keep rubbing 'em out?" asked Josiah of a man standing near.

"You're not used to race meetings," he said.

"No; only been to one or two"

"They reduce the price when a horse is well backed. There's Black Legs, for instance; he was at six to one a bit ago, now he's at fives; if a lot more money goes on, he'll be at fours.

"I see," said Josiah. "I'd better take fives while I can get it."

"You fancy him?"

"He'll win, Dan says so."

"Who's Dan?"

"His jockey"

"The Little Wonder?"

Josiah nodded.

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes."

"No humbug?"

"Not a bit. I know him well. He comes from the same place"

Josiah pushed into the mob round a bookmaker, who wore a tall white hat, a check suit, and a scarlet tie.

"No mistake about finding him again with those togs on," thought Josiah.

The bookmaker was roaring out the odds.

"Five to one Black Legs! Here you are--five to one the Little Wonder! Make haste!"

Josiah fingered a couple of sovereigns, hesitated a moment, then handed them the man.

"Which horse?" he asked.

"Black Legs."

"Ten pounds to two Black Legs," said the bookmaker, then rubbed out the five and placed a four before the horse's name

"I got the best of that deal," thought Josiah, looking at the gaudy-coloured ticket.

"That's ten pounds if he wins," muttered Josiah, "and my two back; I must not forget that; twelve pounds to draw. Jarvis can have his lot out of it."

He tried to find Nancy, but it was a hopeless task, and before he gained a position to see the race the horses were off.

He heard the shouting, and asked what was the cause.

“They’re running,” said a man.

An empty case stood near a coach. Josiah pulled it away, turned it over and stood on it.

“You can’t stand on there,” said a policeman.

“Why not?” asked Josiah

“It’s against the regulations”

“Where can I stand?”

“On your legs,” said the constable, who was hot, thirsty, and irritable.

Josiah clambered on to the wheel of the coach

“Get down out of that,” said a man in his shirt-sleeves and a yellow and black striped waistcoat.

“I’m doing no harm,” said Josiah.

For answer the man took hold of his coat and pulled him.

Josiah resented this, pushed him on the chest, and the man fell backwards into a large hamper. There was a sound of crockery smashing, and the man swore. Josiah beat a retreat, inwardly laughing at the incident. He saw people rushing about, some waving their hats, all looking towards the course.

“Black Legs wins!” some one shouted.

“Where is he?” asked Josiah excitedly.

“There—over there; that purple cap. Don’t you see it?”

Josiah caught sight of the cap, and yelled too. He was tall, and jumping up was able to see Dan. Close alongside the orange jacket was a green and gold.

Black Legs was doing well. He had played a few pranks at the post, but once they were off he quickly settled down. The distance, a mile and five furlongs, was a shade beyond Black Legs’ tether, but Crisp had told Dan how to ride him in order to win.

The Derby winner, Julien, was favourite, and this was the horse the trainer feared most.

Dan was to watch Julien and keep well up to him. “When he makes a move, go after him,” said Crisp.

It was a close race for a mile. When they commenced to race up the straight, Julien forged ahead. Black Legs was lying fourth, and Dan taking him on the outside, went after the leader.

Mr. Foyle watched the race closely from the stand. So did Edwin Swinton and Cecil Havers from the top of a coach. They had taken the advice of a well-known racing man, a friend of Edwin’s, who said Julien could not lose, and backed the Derby winner.

To all appearances the favourite had won the race, and they were congratulating themselves upon supporting him instead of Black Legs. Mr. Foyle was also of this opinion; the uphill finish did not suit his colt.

Nancy and her companion were a long way down the course. As the horses passed them the orange jacket seemed far behind.

“He’s out of it,” said Jarvis.

“Perhaps he’ll catch them. Dan is a wonderful little chap,” said Nancy.

“He’ll need to be to reach that fellow in green and gold.”

The aristocratic plungers, who were on Julien to a man, were counting up their probable gains as the favourite strode up the hill well in front.

Dan persevered ; he knew what Black Legs could do if in the humour. He rode without whip or spurs ; there was no need for them. Crisp knew how many races were lost by using them. He talked to the colt, pressed his legs in, urged him forward. Black Legs buckled to with a will. Dan felt him pull himself together and make a final effort,

The colt had a remarkable turn of speed, and no one knew it better than Dan. His hopes rose ; the jockey on Julien seemed to be taking things easily.

A moment's silence was followed by shouts of "Black Legs !" and it was these Josiah heard as he looked at the bobbing caps on the riders' heads.

Mr. Foyle's hopes rose, his colt had a chance. Dan was doing well.

Julien's jockey realised there was danger, but defeat did not seem probable ; still, he must get everything out of his mount. He had a whip, unfortunately for him, which he used to put courage into Julien. The favourite felt the sting, laid back his ears, swerved to the left, lost a lot of ground at a critical moment.

Dan pulled Black Legs to the right and shot up on the other side. Before Julien got straight again Mr. Foyle's colt was level with him.

A tremendous shout greeted this bit of riding on Dan's part.

Neck and neck the horses raced, but the whip had made Julien sulky, and he declined to respond to his jockey's efforts.

As they drew nearer to the winning-post it was clearly seen that Black Legs held the favourite.

It was all over in a second or two ; Black Legs beat Julien by a clear length, amidst a hurricane of cheers.

"The jockey's a duffer," said Edwin savagely. "If he hadn't hit Julien, he'd have won."

He was probably right ; many people were of the same opinion.

"Whips often lose races," said Crisp to himself.

CHAPTER XXVII

"THE FAVOURITE'S LEFT"

JOSIAH went to draw his money. It was a big win for him. The bookmaker was paying out rapidly, calling to people to come for their money.

"Pay, pay, pay !" he shouted. "Always get your cash here, my hearties ; no waiting. Bring your tickets and get your money. How much ?"

"Twelve pounds," said Josiah.

The man paid him in sovereigns, and said—

"Try again ; your luck's in."

"I will on Thursday," said Josiah. His money safely in his pocket, he searched for Jarvis and Nancy. Tired of waiting for him, they roamed about, and it was not until after the last race he found them.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Nancy.

"Hunting for you."

"You've got the money?" said Jarvis.

"Yes; here's your three pounds. I got five to one."

"That's a good price."

They were loud in their praises of Dan's riding, and Jarvis said he must have done wonders on Black Legs to catch Juben, as the favourite was many lengths ahead when the horses went past them.

"There's no telling what Dan can do when he's put to it," said Josiah.

"We must make haste, or the lads will be home before us," said Nancy.

"Sorry we can't ask you, but it's not our place," said Josiah to Jarvis, who said he would meet them on Thursday.

"How much did you win?" asked Nancy when they arrived at the cottage.

"Seven pounds ten."

"My, what a lot of money!" she said.

"I mean to win more on Thursday," he said.

Dan was elated at his victory. Mr. Foyle promised him a handsome present, and said if he won on Thursday he would double the amount. Crisp and Harry Freelight also told Dan no one could have ridden a better race.

"Tell us all about it," said Josiah at night when the other lads were out.

Dan described the race, and said Black Legs won comfortably. He had no doubt whatever that he would win the St. James's Palace Stakes.

"The Squire has given me fifty pounds, and he'll make it a hundred if I win on Thursday," said Dan.

Nancy looked at him in amazement. She thought how wonderful it was for such a little fellow to make so much money.

"That's better than barge work," said Josiah.

"If Black Legs wins on Thursday I mean to make you and Nancy a nice present. What shall it be?"

"Put the money in the bank," said Nancy. "Josiah has quite as much as is good for him."

"Let me give you twenty pounds towards doing up the *Merry Belle*," said Dan.

"No," said Josiah emphatically.

"But I shall; let me have my own way."

Nancy protested, but Dan looked so disappointed they at last agreed.

"And old Eli must have as much 'bacca as he can smoke, and some good tea," said Dan. "You'll see to it, Nancy?"

She promised, but cautioned him not to be too generous.

"You may want it some day," she said. "One can never tell what may happen."

Dan laughed. He had a prosperous career before him, his outlook on life was rosy; Mr. Foyle was a generous master, and he could always get plenty of riding.

Edwin Swinton hired a coach for the meeting, and motored down from

London each day. Several of the Frolic girls were invited, amongst them Lillian Freelight, who forgot her resentment against him for the occasion.

"I have paid him out," she thought, "and can afford to be generous."

Cecil was not yet transferred to Poolbank. Edwin's tempting offer to join his Ascot party was too much for him. He asked for a week off; the manager declined to grant it, so he took French leave, which was a most unwise course to pursue.

On Tuesday and Wednesday he lost a considerable sum, and borrowed from Edwin, who grumbled at the calls made upon him.

"After this week you'll have to settle up," he said. "I can't go on like this; I am sick of it."

"It was your suggestion," said Cecil.

"I had an object in view at that time; it no longer exists."

"You mean you paid me to help you with Olive?"

"Not exactly that, but I thought you could render me some assistance."

Cecil determined to forget he owed Edwin money, and meant to have a thorough week's enjoyment. He bet freely, drank a lot of champagne and paid particular attention to Lillian.

She felt sorry for him; she learned from Olive that he was only in a minor position in the bank, and knew he had not much money to spend. She ventured to caution him about "going the pace."

Cecil laughed as he said, "It's impossible not to be gay when you are here. I'll make up for it later on; I'll economise."

"If I thought you were running into expense on my account I would not come to-morrow," she said, after the Hunt Cup.

His face fell.

"You don't mean it?" he said.

"I do."

"Then I'll retrench; be more careful."

"That's right. Your sister would be troubled if she knew what you are doing."

"What am I doing?"

"Borrowing money from your friend, and it will have to be paid back."

"I don't owe him much."

"I am glad to hear it; you'll not find him easy to deal with," she said.

Edwin tried to resume their acquaintance on the old footing, but Lillian let him see plainly she did not desire it.

"We understand each other," she said. "You don't expect me to be taken in twice?"

"I was a fool to risk losing you," he said. "Make it up, Lillian; I like you better than any girl I know."

"How nice of you! I feel flattered. You could not get Miss Havers, so you fall back on me. Very obliging, I am sure."

"Nothing of the kind," he answered angrily. "Olive fooled me all along. She married for money, and she'll live to repent it."

"That's a caution for me. 'I must not marry for money," she said.

"Marry me, Lilian; we shall agree very well!" he said.

"I'll think it over," she answered.

"You're not chaffing?"

"Oh, dear, no, it requires some thinking out; you'll acknowledge that?"

"Well, perhaps it does. Anyway, I'm quite willing to do all I can to make you happy."

"Good boy!" she said, and he fancied he detected a tone of sarcasm.

On Cup Day the big race was won by Fairfax, the favourite, Harry Freelight having the mount. This put backers on good terms with themselves, and when a hot favourite landed the New Stakes they were all ready for a plunge on Black Legs for the St. James's Stakes. The colt had risen in public estimation by his victory on the opening day, and the rich St. James's was regarded as a good thing for him. The colt's reputation as a bad-tempered, uncertain customer was forgotten by most people, but there were some who remembered his mule-like exhibitions as a two-year-old when Harry Freelight rode him.

"He has mended his manners; there's no doubt about it, I suppose?" said Monty Wharnehffe to Mr. Foyle.

"Since Dan has ridden him his temper has been everything we could wish."

"And he's not likely to break out again?"

"I do not think there is any danger of it. I hope not," said Mr. Foyle.

Bert Crisp, however, was rather uneasy. Black Legs lashed out and snapped savagely as he saddled him. The colt had a nasty look in his eyes. Altogether, Dan fancied he was not in for a pleasant ride.

"He's in a bad humour," said Crisp; "you must handle him carefully. Let him have his own way as much as possible. I expect he's a red-hot favourite, and there'll be a lot of growling if he's beaten."

Mr. Foyle and Mr. Wharnehffe came up at this time, and Crisp explained how things were going.

"He's in a bad temper," he said. "I don't know what's upset him. There, look at him!"

Black Legs lashed out furiously, then made a grab at his attendant, who luckily dodged him.

Mr. Foyle regarded the colt keenly, wondering at the sudden change; perhaps he would quieten down when Dan mounted.

Crisp lifted Dan on to the colt's back, and Black Legs showed no sign of resentment.

"He seems all right now," said Mr. Foyle.

"There's a cunning look in his eyes," said Crisp. "Keep him away from the others at the post, Dan. Never mind if it costs you a bit of ground! there are only five runners—it won't be difficult."

Dan rode Black Legs out of the paddock, and as the colt went past the stands he was much admired; not one in a hundred knew he had shown temper in the enclosure.

Dan thought everything was going well; Black Legs had quietened down, the exhibition of temper had been short. At the post, however, the favourite played pranks. He backed, reared, kicked, and tried to savage Petersfield, who was next to him.

Dan took him on the outside, and when the tapes went up he whipped round. "The favourite's left!" was the cry from thousands of people.

It was true enough, Black Legs had not made a move, and four horses were already galloping away from him at top speed.

"Throw your hat at him," said Dan to a man looking on. He did so, and it struck the colt in the face. Black Legs swung round, hesitated a moment, then set off after the others. It seemed a hopeless task to try and catch them; but Dan did not lose heart, he remembered the race at Windsor and hoped for the best.

Josiah looked in vain for the orange jacket. Where was it? He saw four horses, then caught sight of Black Legs a long way in the rear.

"No chance for him," he thought, and wished he had not been lucky enough to secure an even five pounds—about a six to four on chance.

Mr Foyle was resigned to losing, when Monty Wharmcliffe said—

"He's going at a terrific pace now, he may possibly have a chance."

"If he gets anywhere near them at the finish he is a greater horse than I thought," said the Squire.

Dan looked at the four horses in front, they were a long way ahead; it seemed hopeless to think of getting on terms with them. He was half inclined to ease his mount and save him for another day. Black Legs, however, was determined when he intended doing his best. His nasty fit of temper was over, perhaps he was ashamed of it, at any rate, he did his best to make up for it. Dan knew the colt had never gone quite so fast before. The speed was marvellous, he seemed to be flying through space.

As he passed along he heard shouts of "Go on, go, go!" "You'll catch 'em!" "Bravo, little 'un!" and so on.

Before the stands were reached Black Legs caught the fast-tiring Stormaway, passed him, and galloped with long, powerful strides up the hill. Petersfield was leading, well ahead, it looked any odds on his winning, but the exciting part of a race is that one can never tell how it will end until the horses pass the judge—the most unexpected things happen in the last hundred yards.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A STAUNCH FRIEND

THE excitement was tremendous. The odds-on favourite, who at one time appeared hopelessly beaten, was gaining on Petersfield and Called Back. Dan sat still; if he moved he feared Black Legs would throw up the game. At every stride the favourite gained; it was a question of distance. Was there time to get up and win?

Josiah had a good view of the race. He held his breath as he saw the orange jacket drawing nearer and nearer to the leaders.

"He'll catch 'em," he shouted.

"Petersfield wins!" said the man next to him.

The result trembled in the balance, and thousands of people waited for the supreme moment.

Black Legs caught Called Back and beat him; then he drew up to Petersfield. It was a gallant fight, a toss-up which horse would win. Locked together, the colts struggled on, dead level, not forty yards from the winning post. Black Legs could not shake off his opponent, and Dan determined to make a final effort. When he rode the colt in his gallops on Newmarket Heath he was in the habit of singing to him in a low voice. He did so now, humming a familiar tune, sitting down tight, lifting him forward. There was an immediate response, Black Legs had saved himself for a final rush, and the effect was electrical.

Good horse though Petersfield was, he had no chance against the terrific speed of Mr. Foyle's colt. The orange jacket drew up, cheer after cheer greeting it as Black Legs got his head in front. The advantage gained he held, and amidst a hurricane of shouts he passed the post a neck in front of his opponent, landing the odds and the stakes.

It was a glorious victory, a most surprising result, as the winner had lost many lengths by his vagaries at the start.

Dan rode a wonderful race. Old sportsmen were loud in their praises of him; "the Little Wonder" deserved his name. He was, on all sides, voted a phenomenal lad.

As he rode Black Legs in he was surrounded by a shouting crowd. It was with some difficulty Crisp led the horse through the crush.

Expressions of approval were heard on all sides. Dan was the hero of the hour, and his face glowed with pride and excitement. It was a thrilling moment for him, a turning-point in his career; he could go ahead rapidly now, owners would bid high for his services.

"Give him a hand," said one, as Dan staggered into the weighing-room under the weight of the loaded saddle.

"He'll manage it," said Crisp with a smile.

"All right," shouted the attendant in the ring, and again there was a cheer.

The Squire put his hand on Dan's shoulder and said kindly --

"You rode a magnificent race. You will be leading jockey in a year or two; mind and keep your head, do not let success spoil you."

Dan looked up at him as he answered --

"I did my best, he's a great colt, or he would not have won."

This Ascot meeting was never forgotten by Dan. In the years that followed, he often remembered Black Legs' victory in the St. James's Stakes.

To one young man the Ascot week proved disastrous; it was Cecil Havers. He owed a book-maker a considerable sum, and was indebted to Edwin Swinton altogether for over five hundred pounds. It was with

uneasy feelings he returned to the bank on Monday; the excitement being over the reaction set in, and he had to face the consequences of his folly.

When the manager arrived he sent for Cecil to his room.

"You caused us great inconvenience by your absence last week," he said. "It is not the first time; I have cautioned you repeatedly, and I cannot overlook it. I am very sorry, but it is my duty to tell you that we shall not require your services after the end of the month."

Cecil had no excuse to make; he acknowledged the justice of the decision and bowed to it.

"I am sorry for him," thought the manager as he left the room. "He is a nice young fellow: I hope it will be a lesson to him."

The same morning Mr. Foyle called to see him.

"I have come to speak to you about young Havers," he said. "I want, if possible, to have him transferred to your branch at Poolbank. I married his sister; I am interested in him. Can you arrange it?"

"I am afraid you are too late," said the manager.

"Too late!" exclaimed Mr. Foyle. "Is he going elsewhere?"

"I have had an unpleasant duty to perform this morning," he said. "Mr. Havers was absent all last week against my express desire. I am sorry to say it is not the first time I have had to complain. He is under notice to leave."

Mr. Foyle looked troubled as he said—

"This is bad news; it will cause his father and my wife much pain."

"There would have been no difficulty in removing him to Poolbank had all gone well," said the manager. "I fear it is impossible now."

"Are you quite sure there is no way out of it?"

"I am afraid not, but I will see what I can do."

Mr. Foyle thanked him.

"I will speak to Cecil later on," he said.

As he was leaving the bank some one brushed past him in a hurry. It was Cecil Havers. Mr. Foyle called after him, but Cecil ran quickly down the street and hailed a hansom. It flashed across Mr. Foyle's mind that Cecil might be in trouble, and if so this accounted for his sudden flight, for such it looked like. He hesitated whether to return to the manager, or to follow him; he decided on the latter course.

Calling a hansom, he told the man to follow the cab in front; it was just turning the corner.

Cecil's cab pulled up at the mansions in Westminster, where Edwin Swinton had his flat.

Mr. Foyle's cab arrived soon after, and he quickly got out. He went to Edwin's rooms and found Cecil there, who was confused when he saw him.

"Edwin is away," said Cecil. "I came to see him on important business."

"Connected with the bank?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"Yes."

"Can I help you?"

The question was kindly put; Cecil felt a sense of relief. Why not ask the Squire to give him the assistance he sorely needed?

"Come, tell me what the trouble is," said Mr. Foyle. "I have been to the bank and seen your manager; I followed you here; you rushed past me as I came out."

"Then you know?" said Cecil, crestfallen.

"The manager spoke of your absence last week; he said you had received notice. Be candid with me; we may be able to put matters right," said Mr. Foyle.

There was a hundred pounds in Bank of England notes burning a hole in Cecil's pocket. He had acted on a sudden, irresistible impulse before he left the bank, and deeply regretted it. What must he do?

"Don't be afraid," said Mr. Foyle. "Remember, you are my brother-in-law." He smiled as he said this.

Cecil's past conduct came vividly before him; he hated himself for deceiving Olive, and also for the part he had played with Edwin.

"The bank—I must go back immediately," he thought.

"Edwin is not here; I must return at once to the bank before they find out," he said.

"Are you absent without leave?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"I asked to go out for an hour," said Cecil.

"I will drive back with you. If you asked to go out, why do you fear your absence being noticed?"

Cecil remained silent.

"Let us return at once," said Mr. Foyle, guessing the truth, but keeping it to himself.

"He knows," thought Cecil. "how generous he is."

They drove back to the bank, and Cecil went in, his heart beating painfully.

"Thank God, I'm in time," he thought, as he put the notes back in his desk.

Mr. Foyle saw the manager again, and asked permission for Cecil to go out with him.

"I wish to talk seriously to him," he said.

"The manager granted his request, and they left the bank together.

Mr. Foyle took him to his town house in — Square.

"You are in trouble, tell me all about it," he said.

Cecil made a clean breast of it, but said nothing about taking the notes from the bank.

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Foyle.

"Yes."

"Then the matter is easily settled; but you must promise me two things."

"I will," said Cecil.

"You must never borrow money, and you must not bet again."

"Not even have a sovereign on one of your horses?" said Cecil.

"Well, I will make an exception. When I tell you to have a little on one of mine, you can do so," said Mr. Foyle. "Does that make it easier for you?"

"Indeed, it does; I promise willingly," said Cecil, "you are too kind to me."

"I will settle with Edwin," said Mr. Foyle. "Do you know where he is?"

"No; I have no idea."

"I ought to be at Eagle Hurst, but I am glad I did not return on Saturday now."

Cecil wondered if Edwin was at Eagle Hurst; he had not been at his flat since he left early on Saturday morning. If he was there, why had he gone?

"If I can arrange for you to enter the bank at Poolbank, are you willing to go there?" said Mr. Foyle.

"Yes, indeed, I am; I shall be only too pleased," said Cecil eagerly.

"Then I will do what I can in that direction," said Mr. Foyle.

Cecil hesitated, he had heard Edwin speak of Olive in a way he resented. He wondered if he was at Eagle Hurst.

"I have an idea I know where Edwin is," he said.

"Where?"

"I may be wrong, but I think he has gone to Eagle Hurst."

Mr. Foyle's face grew stern as he said—

"I do not think he would go there in my absence. I have forbidden it. Olive does not know; but I thought it for the best. He would hardly venture there under the circumstances."

Cecil made no reply for some time; as they were going out of the house he said—

"Are you returning home to-day?"

"Yes; this evening."

"I am very glad," said Cecil.

Mr. Foyle thought this curious, but returned no answer.

When Cecil arrived at the bank next morning the manager sent for him and said—

"Will you promise to do better if I send you to our Poolbank branch?"

"If you will give me the chance you will have no cause to regret it," said Cecil.

"Then I will withdraw the notice I gave you yesterday. You have Mr. Foyle to thank for this; he is a staunch friend," said the manager.

CHAPTER XXIX

EDWIN'S MISTAKE

EDWIN SWINTON pressed Lilian Freelight for an answer, and she declined to marry him; she had another offer, but did not mention it. This put him in a very bad temper. He consoled himself by joining a party of friends and dining at Richmond with them. A copious supply of champagne made him reckless, and he was hardly responsible for his actions when he took the train to Poolbank late on Saturday night.

It was past twelve when he arrived at Eagle Hurst. Olive had retired for the night, and was not aware of his presence in the house until Sunday

morning ; when she heard of it she was troubled. Why had he come during her husband's absence ?

Edwin slept heavily, and about nine o'clock rang the bell.

"Get me a stiff brandy and soda," he said, "I feel seedy." He drank it, had a bath, and pulled himself together ; he was not aware Mr. Foyle was absent.

He found Olive downstairs, and thought she greeted him in a distant manner.

"Where is Mr. Foyle ?" he asked

"Not home yet ; did you not know ?"

She was relieved to think he was not aware of her husband's absence when he came down from London.

"Not here !" exclaimed Edwin ; "then you are alone ?"

"Yes. I am going to church ; will you come ?"

He made some excuse, and she was glad of it.

They dined together, during the day Edwin made free with the wine ; he was in a jovial humour.

"I am glad I came," he said, after dinner ; "I wanted to talk with you, Olive."

She did not like him calling her Olive, but hesitated to object ; their relationship was peculiar. Edwin rambled along, talking somewhat incoherently. She wished Mr. Foyle would return. By degrees he became bolder, said things she resented, and her face flushed angrily. She saw he was not in a fit state to control himself, and sought for an excuse to leave him.

This, however, did not suit Edwin's purpose. A little flattery would be entertaining. He was muddled sufficiently to think she would not object.

"You ought to have married me, Olive," he said. "We should have been very happy."

"If you talk in this strain, I shall leave you," she said.

"Don't go. Where's the harm ? I love you more than ever. I can't help it."

She rose from her chair and went towards the door. Seeing she was escaping him, and knowing she would not return, he became desperate. Stumbling from his seat, he caught her round the waist and held her firmly.

"Let me go, please !" she said indignantly, struggling to free herself. She had no wish to create a scene, or give the servants an opportunity to gossip.

"Give me a kiss, Olive !" he said.

She was thoroughly roused at this insult. She tried to make excuses for him and failed. There was a struggle for the mastery, and eventually she got away from him.

"It is cowardly, ungentlemanly, for you to behave like this," she said, and her voice shook.

"I'm sorry," he said ; "but I love you, Olive."

"It is a peculiar way you have of showing it," she answered.

"You are more beautiful than ever, it is enough to turn any fellow's head."

"If you do not allow me to leave the room, I shall tell my husband how you have behaved," she said.

He laughed—it was not a nice laugh—as he answered, “I don’t think I would if I were you. These old men are jealous of their young wives.”

She was very angry, a little afraid. There was no telling how far he might go in his present confused state of mind.

“Why not give me a kiss for old time’s sake, Olive? I’m sure I deserve it. You treated me badly.”

She made no answer, but went farther away from him. He saw her repugnance, and it angered him.

“You do not love him,” he said. “You were forced to marry him. Don’t deny it. I am sure it is so,” he said.

“You are mistaken,” she said quietly. “I do love him. You do not know the meaning of the word.”

“When I look at you I do,” he said.

“That is not love,” said Olive.

“Then it’s a good substitute,” he answered. His eyes flashed; he looked dangerous. Before Olive realised what had happened, he sprang forward and had her in his arms again. This time she could not avoid him, and he kissed her roughly several times.

With all her strength she pushed him away and stood facing him, scorn and contempt in her eyes.

“Go!” she said. “Leave the house before my husband returns, or he will horsewhip you as you deserve. You have insulted me beyond forgiveness. I will not have you in the house again.”

“Ordered out, am I?” he said sarcastically. “You have stepped into my mother’s shoes; do you know how she was treated!”

“I have no desire to hear anything about her.”

“He abused her shamefully; he is responsible for her death.”

“How dare you say that!” said Olive indignantly.

“He neglected her, drove her wild, made her miserable,” said Edwin. “It was all his doing; I hate him for it. You will find him out before long, and then you will repent you refused me.”

She smiled at this, it was so utterly ridiculous.

“You may laugh!” he said angrily. “Wait until you find him out. You are his third wife, don’t forget that.”

Olive went towards the door again.

“If you leave the room I will make you sorry for it,” he said.

Something in his menacing tone stopped her; she looked at him inquiringly.

Edwin was recovering from the effects of the wine and began to realise that he had gone too far. If she told Mr. Foyle serious consequences might follow; if she refrained from doing so this scene would be a secret between them.

“You mean to tell Mr. Foyle what has taken place?” he said.

“Yes.”

“I warn you not to do so.”

“I shall.”

“Then I’ll ruin your brother,” he said quietly.

She started. Cecil was still very dear to her ; despite what he had done, she reflected that he might be in Edwin's power. Julian had hinted as much.

"What has Cecil to do with you?"

"It's not what he has to do with me, it is what I can do to him."

"You are afraid to face the consequences of your behaviour, and are trying to frighten me," she said.

"Promise me you will not tell Mr Foyle what has passed between us."

"Nothing has passed between us, your conduct is disgraceful," she said.

"Will you overlook it?" he asked.

"No."

"You are still determined to tell Mr. Foyle?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall go to Cecil's manager, and tell him he owes me five hundred pounds ; that he bets heavily, gambles at cards, keeps fast company, and is a most unreliable young man," said Edwin slowly.

To Olive's innocent mind all this sounded terrible. If Edwin carried out his threat she trembled to think what might happen to her brother. On the other hand, if she did not tell her husband what Edwin had done it would seem to condone his offence, and he might take advantage of it on another occasion. She was in an awkward predicament.

"How can I tell whether this is true?" she asked.

"You will have to accept my word for it, if you do not, shall certainly carry out my plan," he said.

"Will you leave the house if I promise not to tell my husband how badly you have behaved?" she said.

"Yes."

"And you will do nothing to injure Cecil?"

"I promise you I will not."

"Then I will try and forget what you have done ; but you must not come here."

"Am I never to see you again?" he asked.

"I am afraid I shall meet you in many places," she said.

"And you have no desire to do so?"

"No, I cannot trust you after to-day."

"I will not offend again ; the wine got into my head."

He was rather ashamed of himself, he really liked Olive, and saw he had wounded her deeply.

"I am willing to believe you," she said ; "I will try to forgive you."

"I have behaved like a brute," he said. "You do not think I knew Mr. Foyle was absent when I came here?"

"No."

"I am glad of that ; he may think differently."

"Not if you leave at once," she said. "I will convince him."

"Will you shake hands with me?"

"No ; not yet."

"Then you do not forgive me?" he said.

"I cannot; you have gone too far."

Edwin knew she would never treat him in the same friendly manner again. He had only himself to thank, but it galled him deeply.

He did not see her again before he left Eagle Hurst. He wondered what madness possessed him when he went down to Poolbank the night before Olive would never forget what he had done. He knew she was severed from him, that she would avoid meeting him in future.

Mr. Foyle arrived at Eagle Hurst and thought Olive looked far from well. She had suffered a good deal since Edwin Swinton left; his conduct had been outrageous. When she thought the matter over she was glad she had promised not to tell her husband, it would only have caused him pain, and the consequences might have been more serious than she expected.

"Cecil is coming to Poolbank," said Mr. Foyle.

Olive's heart beat fast; she was very thankful, grateful to him, for she knew it was his doing.

She expressed her pleasure and thanked him.

"I know it is your influence has brought it about," she said.

She thought it better to tell him Edwin Swinton had been to Eagle Hurst.

"He was not aware you were away, or he would not have come," she said.

"He told you so?" he asked.

"Yes; at least he said he did not know you were away."

"When did he return to town?"

"Sunday night."

She seemed nervous, but he did not question her further until the following morning, when he asked her several things which she answered without hesitation.

"He was not quite himself when he came," she said with a smile.

"I hope he behaved well," said the Squire.

"I persuaded him to return to town after dinner on Sunday; I thought it best," she said.

"You did quite right; he must remove his things to Foxglove, then there will be no excuse for his coming here. I cannot permit it; he might cause you some annoyance," he said.

He seemed to dismiss Edwin's visit from his mind, for which she was thankful.

CHAPTER XXX

AT THE HEIGHT OF SUCCESS

DAN'S career as a jockey commenced in earnest when he was out of his time. Mr. Foyle gave him a big retainer for first claim on his services, and he succeeded Harry Freelight as the stable jockey when he retired.

When a colt by Fireworks—Weather Glass arrived at Dinmore House to be trained, Dan was delighted. Storm Signal was a real beauty, and Crisp

prophesied great things for him. It reminded Dan of old times when he thought of Weather Glass, and he laughed to himself as he recalled his famous ride after the hounds on the old mare. These recollections created a longing to visit the *Merry Belle* again. It was some time since he had seen Josiah and Nancy, but he had not forgotten them now the days of prosperity had dawned.

"I'd like a trip on the old barge again," he said to Bert Crisp. "They were very good to me in the old days, and I never had a better master than Josiah."

"Not even me?" said Crisp.

"No; not even you," laughed Dan.

It was difficult to get away from Newmarket, but he succeeded in arranging it, and surprised Josiah by turning up unexpectedly on the *Merry Belle*.

"How did you know we were at Poolbank?" asked Josiah. Nancy was in the village shopping, unaware of his arrival.

"I wrote a line to Jack Dent, and asked him to send me a telegram," said Dan.

"You're a famous jockey now," said Josiah, looking at him admiringly.

"I expect you'll be rich soon."

"I'm saving money," said Dan modestly.

"You haven't grown much," said Josiah.

"I am glad of it; the smaller I am, the more riding I get. I can go to the scale at six stone seven easily."

"It's wonderful where all your strength comes from," said Josiah.

Dan laughed as he explained that plenty of riding, a healthy life, and plain living, had much to do with it.

When Nancy arrived, Dan was in the cabin; he saw her coming, and bolted down the steps.

She gave a cry of delight when she saw him; and taking him in her arms kissed him, as she had done many times when he was a mere child.

Dan was amused, he wondered what the lads at Dinmore House would have said had they seen him locked in Nancy's arms; he imagined the chaffing he would have been subjected to.

"Dan's too old to be kissed," said Josiah, with a broad smile.

"He'll never be too old for me to kiss him, will you, Dan?" said Nancy.

"No; I like it," he answered, with a blush and a look at Josiah.

"I'm going a trip with you, if you'll have me," said Dan.

"That's grand," said Josiah; "but you'll find the *Merry Belle* a bit cramped for room, after what you've been used to lately."

"I'll sleep on deck," said Dan; "it's warm at nights, and there's plenty of room there."

Nancy protested.

"Why not sleep in your old bunk?" she said.

"He's getting a big boy now," sang Josiah, and Nancy disappeared.

The trip on the *Merry Belle* lasted nearly a week; and Dan had not enjoyed himself so much for a long time. He had forgotten nothing, and Josiah said he was just as smart as ever.

"You can handle a boat as well as anyone," he said, "but I expect you'd find it a bit slow after racing."

Before he left the *Merry Belle*, when she returned to Poolbank, he bought Nancy several presents, and gave Josiah a few pipe, and sundry other things, with which he was mightily pleased.

"The lad's heart's too big for his body," said Josiah. "He's a wonderful little man, Nance."

"That he is; if he'd your size, Josiah, goodness knows what he'd be up to."

"Most likely run away with you," he said.

"Go along with you," said Nancy. "I'm old enough to be his mother; and you know very well I think you are the finest man on earth."

"What do you expect for that?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"We're well mated, Nancy; but I wish——" He hesitated.

"I know," she said; "it won't hurt me to hear it. You wish we had a son like Dan?"

Josiah sighed. He dearly wished she had a child; it would have completed his happiness.

Dan surprised Eli at the cottage. The old man was more feeble, but wonderfully active for his years. He hardly understood how great Dan's success was, but appreciated all the nice things Dan brought for him.

"You'll get a pound or two now and again for riding 'osses?" he said questioningly.

"Yes, I generally have a few pounds in my pocket," said Dan, producing several sovereigns.

"It's none safe to carry so much gold about," said Eli, wagging his head in a warning manner.

Dan laughed as he said—

"How much do you think I make in a year?"

"Don't know; maybe twenty pounds," said Eli.

"I get more than that for one ride sometimes."

Eli held up his hands in amazement.

"Never," he exclaimed.

"But I do; and I make over a thousand pounds in a year."

Eli gasped. It was incredible. A thousand pounds seemed an immense fortune.

"If you are ever short of money you must let me give you some," said Dan. "I have more than I want, much more."

"Nay, lad," said Eli. "What you earn you must keep; and I want for naught, thanks be to the Squire."

Dan knew his wants were simple, but before he went back to Newmarket he gave Jarvis, the store-keeper, strict orders to keep Eli well supplied. He visited Eagle Hurst, where he found many old friends in the stables and about the house.

Olive welcomed him; showed him her son—a fine little fellow, and the

pride of the Squire, who doted upon the child, and would have spoiled him had she permitted it.

"You must dine with us to-night, Dan," she said.

"Me!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes! Mr Foyle wishes it, so do I; remember, you are a very wonderful man now," she said.

Dan never forgot that dinner, it was a revelation to him; and although in after years he mixed with many men far above him in rank and station, he always thought of his first introduction to society at Eagle Hurst, and of the kindness of the Squire and his wife.

Dan accompanied Mr Foyle round the canal and saw old Weather Glass again. The mare recognised him, much to Dan's delight, and as he patted her nose he thought of the time when she tugged the *Merry Belle* along the canal.

"She's lucky to find a home like this," he said.

"And I was lucky to buy her," said the Squire. "What do you think of Storm Signal, Dan?"

"He's a grand colt; good enough to win anything, Crisp says."

"I wish I had entered him in the Derby."

"It is a pity," said Dan. "But he's in the St. Leger?"

"I always enter something for the Doncaster event," said Mr Foyle; "that is how he comes to be in."

Dan returned to Newmarket and settled down to hard work again. The trainer missed him very much and was glad to see him back.

Cecil Havers was now manager of the Peckham branch of the bank, and seldom went to London. Mr Foyle treated him as one of the family, and he had the run of the stables, always finding a mount there for the hunting season. He remembered the Squire's kindness, and had long since paid back the money Mr Foyle advanced him, and which he reluctantly accepted, eventually taking it because he saw Cecil would not be satisfied otherwise. It was a great joy to Olive that her brother had redeemed the past, and she no longer remembered the part he had played with Edwin Swinton. His future seemed assured, for he was given to understand that the Squire had dealt liberally with him in money matters.

As for Edwin Swinton, he found Foxglove dull and was seldom there, and Olive let him see he was not a welcome guest at Eagle Hurst. Had his income not been large he would speedily have found himself in difficulties. His expenses were heavy. He had several horses in training, and sometimes tried to beat the Dinnmore House stable, but finding this beyond him contented himself with going for smaller stakes.

He made one more attempt to secure Lillian, but she effectually settled his pretensions by saying—

"I am engaged, and am to be married in a month."

"Indeed," he replied incredulously; "and who is the favoured individual?"

"Hamil Foot," said Lilian, smiling.

"What!" he exclaimed. "The manager of the Frolic?"
She nodded.

"But he's twenty years older than you are—more!"

"You young men have no chance with the old ones," she said. "They are more reliable."

"It's absurd, ridiculous; old Foot ought to be ashamed of himself."

"But he isn't; he's very proud of his conquest, at least, so he tells every one, and I have no reason to disbelieve him," she said.

"There's one thing," said Edwin, "he won't live long, and you'll make an interesting widow. I think I'll wait and try my luck again later on."

"Perhaps Mrs. Foyle will be free in a few years," said Lilian.

"The Squire is as hard as nails," said Edwin. "He'll last a long time."

"I hope so," said Lilian. "Now if you popped off, there'd be no one to miss you."

This thrust went home, and Edwin Swinton made no further remarks.

The following year Storm Signal turned out to be a remarkable three-year-old. Dan won four races on him, and wound up by riding him to victory in the St Leger. "The Little Wonder" had hundreds of followers on the race-course, and his victories were hailed with enthusiasm. Dan's career was watched with interest by many people, and no one took a greater interest in his doings than Josiah Fudge. He won money over Dan's mounts, never investing until he had a line from Newmarket giving him the hint. He was prosperous, and had several boats on the canal, but still stuck to the old *Merry Belle*, his favourite craft.

"We'll buy a house in Poolbank afore long," he said to Nancy. "It's time you had a home of your own ashore."

"I'm quite contented," she answered.

"But I'm not, my girl. I won a good bit over Storm Signal this year, and when I get a chance I'll snap up a place for you," he said.

"And what about you? Nice goings on there'd be if I let you go alone on the *Merry Belle*," said Nancy.

"I'll stop ashore and look after things," he said; "then you'll have me under your eye."

A year or two later Dan visited Eagle Hurst stud again, and saw his old friend Black Legs living in luxury.

"You gave me my first chance, and I shall always remember you," said Dan. "If it had not been for you I don't suppose I should ever have been called 'The Little Wonder.'"

1287
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Nat Gould, see facing the title page
of this book.

1

